Religion and Reason

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Arvind Sharma

To the Things Themselves

Essays on the Discourse and Practice of the Phenomenology of Religion

With a Foreword by
Jacques Waardenburg

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Foreword

The author of this volume, Professor Arvind Sharma, of Indian descent who now teaches in Canada, has had a distinguished scholarly career. He started out studying History, Economics and Sanskrit at Allahabad University and continued in the U.S., where he obtained an MA degree in Economics at Syracuse University. He then pursued his studies at Harvard, where he obtained a Masters degree in Theological Studies in 1974 and a PhD in Sanskrit and Indian Studies in 1978. He taught in Australia at the Universities of Queensland and Sydney, in the U.S. at Temple University and in Canada at McGill University. Since January 1994, Professor Sharma has held the Birks Chair in Comparative Religion at McGill University, Montreal. He has been invited to teach at Harvard University as Visiting Professor of Indic Studies in 2001. In addition to numerous academic and other activities, Professor Sharma is the author of some sixteen books in the field of Indian studies and the co-author of five others in this field, to which should be added a great number of scholarly articles and contributions to books in the field of comparative religion. He has edited some fourteen volumes on a broad variety of subjects in this field.

The present book deals with that complex phenomenon in the scholarly study of religion that passes under the somewhat mystifying name of the "Phenomenology of Religion." Phenomenology itself, first used in the German philosophical tradition by Johann Heinrich Lambert in 1764 and in the English tradition by John Robison in 1798, would develop into a distinct European continental movement of thought since the end of the 19th century with thinkers like Franz Brentano in Austria, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger in Germany, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur in France. As for the term phenomenology of religion, it was first used by P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, then Professor of History of Religions at the University of Amsterdam, in 1887. It became the name for a particular approach – or family of

approaches – in the scholarly study of religion, which developed most notably in the Netherlands and in which also other, in particular Scandinavian, scholars took part.

Both phenomenology as a philosophical school and the phenomenology of religion as a scholarly discipline found their way to North America shortly before and then after World War II. Here other traditions of thought and other ways of studying religions prevailed. European visitors and immigrants had to explain the cultural legacy of phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion to an open-minded generation of American intellectuals, in particular in the 1950s and 1960s. This led to further developments of both in the New World.

The American trajectory of the phenomenology of religion is roughly half a century old. In some cases it was closely linked with or parallel to theological aims and needs. Here and there it was pursued on the basis of particular philosophical concerns. In general, it responded to cultural or intercultural interests. In certain cases, research in the phenomenology of religion was nourished by more personal spiritual searches. The discussions about the phenomenology of religion in North America have been heavily influenced by positions taken towards the work of Mircea Eliade after he was appointed at the University of Chicago in 1957.

Other developments arose through the application of phenomenological analysis in the sociology of religion, as in the work of Peter Berger. A particular application in North America seems to have been the service that the phenomenology of religion rendered in intercultural and interreligious understanding, allowing an inside view of another culture or religion.

It seems to me that the main interest and focus of Professor Sharma's present inquiry into the American English discourse about the phenomenology of religion lies here. The book contains a continuing reflection on statements made by phenomenologically oriented scholars working in the field of religion. The author's aim is to understand what phenomenologists in general, and phenomenologists of religion in particular, have been doing and what they have been aiming at. The quest to arrive at "the insider's viewpoint" is a guiding thread throughout the book.

Why then is the phenomenology of religion relevant to the author? He refers to an article by Michael Pye that mentions two virtues of Dutch phenomenology of religion (p. 284):

1) to free the study of religion from the control of Christian theology by offering a neutral framework that brackets off questions of truth and value;
2) to grasp the significance of the complex of religious data from the point of view of the believer or participant himself.

Professor Sharma continuously stresses the second point: the need to have access to the insider's view without endorsing it. He recognizes the same call to do justice to the insider's perspective in trends like the disclaimer of Orientalism, the rise of women's studies and the post-modernist protest against claims of scholarly objectivity. Consequently, he is interested in the phenomenology of religion while recognizing a certain subjective element in it. While being scholarly it can at least approximate but never completely grasp the insider's perspective.

Besides these two virtues mentioned by Michael Pye, Professo Sharma also mentions what he himself sees as a third virtue of the phenomenology of religion:

3) to make possible a "religious" method of studying religion a "one which accords with the insider's view" (p. 257), agai without endorsing it. Such a "religious" way of studying religio has its analogy in the study of art, music, literature and medicine where a particular "tuning" has been developed to the subject o study. These subjects can of course also be studied in more de tached ways. However, "[t]he identification of the religious way(s of studying religion has been facilitated by the phenomenologica approach to the study of religion" (p. 274).

For Professor Sharma, such a "religious" way of studying religion, i search of the insider's point of view, does not diminish the scholarl nature of the enterprise. First, the phenomenologist does not endors that point of view himself. Second, the phenomenology of religio "must never allow its explicit epistemology to slide into, or even to wards, an implicit ontology or 'theology'" (p. 281). Third, it shoul not necessarily protect the turf of religion; "the religious way of study ing religion *may* reveal that all religion is not all religious" (p. 267).

In this connection, it is interesting to note Professor Sharma's contention that we can study religion very well without defining its nature or assuming an irreducible element. He reproaches scholars of religion for proclaiming an irreducibility, for instance of the sacred (M. Eliade) or of faith (W. Cantwell Smith). In Professor Sharma's view, scholars in religious studies should have a universal outlook. They should work in the perspective of the universality of humanity, although in their research they constantly come across what Kees Bolle calls "culturocentricities" (p. 283, n. 17), not only in the religions they study, but also in themselves. True epochè implies for Kees Bolle that a scholar recognizes his or her own value judgments and the guiding ideas present in his or her scholarship (ibid.).

In this connection it is relevant to ask how Professor Sharma sees the relationship between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion. He discusses the question in Chapter XI and concludes that they are different but not completely independent. Both try to free research and thought from metaphysical presuppositions and from the idea that the scientific method should be the paradigm of rationality as such. But they are different in several respects. Professor Sharma refers here to the results of previous studies.

Taking up five characteristics of philosophical phenomenology as identified by Douglas Allen, Professor Sharma quotes Allen as saying that phenomenologists of religion tend to embody one or more of these characteristics and that Mircea Eliade embodied all five. Yet, the phenomenology of religion differs significantly from philosophical phenomenology in that it constantly works with historical – and social – phenomena. It is these particular phenomena that are the source of our constitution and judgment, rather than the reverse, as is assumed in philosophical phenomenology.

Comparing Husserl's method as described by Frank Whaling and that of G. van der Leeuw, Professor Sharma sees three major differences. First, the phenomenology of religion is comparative in nature, philosophical phenomenology much less so. Second, the phenomenology of religion tries to understand "typically the world of the believer of *another* religious tradition as it is disclosed to *him* or *her*" (p. 245), whereas philosophical phenomenology tries to understand the world as it is disclosed to *us ourselves*. Third, whereas in the phenomenology of religion the scholar is asked to place himself in the position of the believer, in philosophical phenomenology such a question cannot even arise.

Although Professor Sharma sees family resemblances between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion, he concludes that they do not belong to the same nuclear family. The phenomenology of religion lies somewhere between the empirical and the philosophical study of religion. It applies epochè and eidetic vision in its own way, one different from philosophical phenomenology.

Several studies have appeared lately on the phenomenology of religion in relation to philosophical phenomenology, written successively by Thomas Ryba (1991), George Alfred James (1995) and Dag Hedin (1997). Ryba and Hedin look at the phenomenology of religion from the angle of philosophical phenomenology. G.A. James concentrates on the phenomenology of religion and stresses its originality compared with philosophical phenomenology. He shows that the differing approaches in the phenomenology of religion, as they arose in the Netherlands as early as the first decades of the 20th century, have antecedents in the different views of philosophical phenomenology itself that had developed earlier in its various German and English branches.

Compared with these previous studies, the originality of Professor Sharma's study is threefold. He takes the actual discourse of phenomenologists of religion in their texts as the point of departure for his reflection. He extends the phenomenology of religion from a more or less Western approach to one that can be applied worldwide. And he is especially concerned with the phenomenological study of living religions, focusing on the insider's point of view. In this way, the phenomenology of religion obtains a relevance for present-day intercultural relations and communication.

Since the appearance of Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion* in 1933, perhaps even earlier, and in any case increasingly since the 1960s, there has been a certain confusion about the phenomenology of religion. This was the case not only among empirical scholars and philosophers, many of whom denied it legitimate scholarly or philosophical status. Its own practitioners, too, held

different views about it. These views are the subject of the present study. The reader finds here a careful reflective inquiry into them, with references to the history of philosophical phenomenology, the phenomenological approach to religious data and some research applications. He or she can also take delight in certain expectations and projects that scholars have formulated about the phenomenology of religion as a scholarly ideal.

Professor Sharma has been searching his way through these many and sometimes contradictory views on the phenomenology of religion, like an analyst exploring whether there is something of value to be found in the soil. In this research he did not let himself be impressed by existing schools or authorities – varying from mainstream theologians or philosophers through academic specialists to visionary minds – and certainly not by current fashions or public opinion. He simply took stock of the discourses contained in the texts he studied. And then he developed his own thinking.

At this point I may perhaps be allowed to draw on some personal memories. The phenomenological movement in its European context, as described by H. Spiegelberg, implied a fundamental revision of certain 19th-century theories of consciousness. It offered a new look at and then discovery of reality, mankind's world and human expressions. The way in which people, once they had been touched by the phenomenological twist, experienced and thought about reality was new and distinguished itself from current scientific theory, religious idealism and political ideologies. When I was a student at the University of Amsterdam at the beginning of the 1950s, this phenomenology, together with existential philosophy in its German and French varieties, was a real discovery. It opened the eyes and enlightened the mind; its connections with art and literature further heightened its attraction.

The concept of phenomenology was also used in the study of religions and religion. However, the courses in philosophy and in the phenomenology of religion, taught in the Faculties of Arts and Theology respectively, had nothing to do with each other. At Dutch universities, the phenomenology of religion was taught in Faculties of Theology. One could not chose it as a major discipline in itself, but always in connection with an empirical discipline such as the

history, sociology or psychology of religion. I do not remember that it could be combined with the anthropology of religion at the time, at least not in Amsterdam.

Looking back now, one should say that the creative phase of the phenomenology of religion in the Netherlands was before World War II. Later scholars, who had or had not sat at the feet of W.B. Kristensen or G. van der Leeuw, had neither their stature nor their originality. I must admit that, at the time, the courses in the phenomenology of religion were not very stimulating. Their main purpose was to offer information, which was all the more needed since there were not many books in this field, certainly not in Dutch. Time was not yet ripe for a critical way of thinking that would have questioned the underlying notions of religion and religions, demonstrating their character as coustruction.

This experience was more or less confirmed when I went abroad. Instead of taking phenomenology as a critical tool towards current research on and thinking about religion, most scholars used it as an instrument for understanding religion and transmitting the values they had understood. Whereas in the 1960s, for instance, social scientists, reflecting phenomenologically, spoke of the "social" construction of reality, I do not remember any scholar of religion at the time who spoke of the "religious" constructions of reality.

The phenomenology of religion, as it was practiced in the 1950s and 1960s, collected and interpreted religious data on the basis of starting points that were not and could not be fundamentally questioned, since they referred to values that seemed self-evident, underlying European culture.

The aim of the phenomenology of religion was high and its ambition great: to obtain access to the more or less lost meanings of religions of the past and the faraway meanings of living religions outside Christianity. This task was carried out through hard labor, with an unconditional commitment to scholarship. The researchers at work enjoyed discovering spiritual values of "foreign" religions while being discreet about their own experiences.

In the course of their research, those religions largely lost their "foreign" character.

Like the study of religion in general, the phenomenology of religion had appeared on a rather complex cultural scene. It was characterized by competing claims and rivalries between Churches as well as between Christianity and other religions. Since the Enlightenment, religion had been the subject of rational debate in Western Europe, coming to a climax in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Powerful ideologies had arisen that mobilized people for different causes. In this context, the phenomenology of religion was something like a peace movement. It did not stress differences and conflicts in the field of religion, but wanted to understand. It was attentive to general structures and was somehow intent on a universal orientation.

Unfortunately, fundamental problems of religious meaning and signification, which should have been treated by the phenomenology of religion, were not critically dealt with. This may have been due to a too narrow interpretation of the rule of epochè, refraining from any judgment about ultimate truth and reality in the phenomenology of religion.

It certainly will be a difficult task one day, and not only for technical reasons, to write a history of the phenomenology of religion as it developed in various 20th-century European countries. First of all, this kind of research has been done and represented more by individual persons coming from different cultural backgrounds than by particular institutions or schools. Moreover, much scholarship on religion has been devoted to comparative studies, and one has to decide what part of this could be classified as the phenomenology of religion, even if it was not called so by the scholars themselves.

Furthermore, it will be difficult to assess the interaction between the phenomenology and the history of religions, or its relationship with the quickly rising social sciences. Last but not least, one should clarify what is to be understood by the phenomenology of religion in the context of a reflective rather than a dogmatic epistemology of the scholarly study of religions.

Speaking about myself again, I started out in 1949 in Amsterdam as a student of C.J. Bleeker, in the line of the "classical" phenomenology of religion. In the course of time, I have become increasingly interested in the religious interpretations that persons and groups

have given of specific events, phenomena and whole religions. It is not only religions and religious phenomena themselves but also and especially what people in different contexts made of them that is of interest. The phenomenology of religion then becomes the study of religious interpretations and constructions and of behavior resulting from them.

A central problem here is what I call the "subject's meaning," that is to say what something means or meant for a particular person or gronp in a particular situation or context. Or, to put it more actively, the interpretation and practice – religious or otherwise – that a person or group more or less consciously gives to particular religious phenomena or to a particular religion.

This comes down to the study of religious constructions of reality. In this work, one has to take into account not only the actors bnt also the socio-political contexts and the cultural and religious traditions in which such constructions were or are made. Notwithstanding differences in procedure, I see here a major convergence between the research perspective of Professor Sharma and my own still rather abstract explorations.

It would seem that the fundamental problem common to the "classical" phenomenology of religion, Professor Sharma's quest for the "insider's" point of view, and my own interest in religious constructions is that of a solid knowledge and a meaningful interpretation of human expressions that have a religious reference. Whether we search for general religious structures – such as divine law, sacrificial behavior or millenarian expectations – or if we are looking for meaning patterns within a given religion, or if we try to reconstruct other people's religious constructions, in all three cases we have to do with research on meaning.

The phenomenology of religion, whether of the description or the *Verstehen* variety, whether philosophically or existentially oriented, is one possible way of dealing with the problem of religious meaning. It responds to an intellectual need, that is to say it seeks to make sense of things religious and not to accept without further ado that religions are examples of non-sense. The phenomenology of religion, then, is a particnlar approach in this quest, not only as a kind of theory about religion in general, but also as a particular way of

studying religious data, which presupposes an open type of theory. Are religions and religious phenomena in the end symbolic reservoirs, constructs that allow for human communication, and – in very different ways and in different contexts – give orientation to behavior and thought so that these become meaningful within the communities concerned?

Phenomenological research should be carried out with modesty and discretion. Scientific premises do not permit us to declare in advance that people's positions are illusory. We do not impose a judgment on people's beliefs and practices. We do not claim that our explanatory schemes provide answers to the metaphysical and theological problems that people sought to solve by means of their religion. We just look at what is or was meaningful to people. The phenomenology of religion is thus an "outside-inside" reconstruction of what is or was religiously meaningful to other people in particular situations and contexts.

Rather than putting the phenomenology of religion on trial or bringing it before a possihle inquisition, let me rather look at it in the context of place and time and in a wider research perspective. I may note five points.

1) The debate about the phenomenology of religion may originally have heen a scholarly debate. In fact it has been in many respects an ideological debate as well, linked to wider debates in the West about the place of religion in modern societies and about the shaping of these societies. The scholars themselves mostly did not actively participate in this debate, keeping aloof with their study of a "foreign" religion and culture. Quite naturally, they tended to be apologetic both for their own notion of "religion" and for the values they had discovered in that "foreign" religion and culture, probably not unrelated to the very notion of religion.

2) The classical phenomenology of religion sometimes furthered a certain naivete in scholarship by stressing, in addition to the need for factual knowledge, too much the idea of intuition and pure listening to the truths to which religious texts testified – rather than radically interrogating and questioning them. It prevented people from becoming aware of hermeneutic problems and of their own reception of and dependency on the values current in their society.

3) Individual researchers, by their personal gifts and dedication to scholarship, have given important impulses to the study of religion in general and to the phenomenology of religion in particular. But it is unfortunate that both pupils and broader circles tend to identify the craft or discipline of phenomenology of religion solely with the work of one particular scholar who enjoys or enjoyed authority.

4) Phenomenology as such, as a philosophy of consciousness that concentrates on experience, is not conducive to taking a stand against things and moving to action. Some phenomenologists have taken rather conservative political positions. Phenomenologists of religion, sympathetic to the spiritual orientations they studied, have not always escaped from one danger of the epochè: not committing oneself. Such attitudes may have helped keep the phenomenology of religion marginal to society.

5) Like Orientalism, the phenomenology of religion developed at a time, not ouly of European ethnocentric views of the world, but also of Western domination of many Asian and African societies. The people whose religions were studied were not always recognized as actors in their own right. Moreover, much atteution was given to the study of great cultures and religions in the past. Again, the spirituality of people living outside the West has often been seen and interpreted in terms of Western norms and values that were imposed on them. One must criticize much phenomenology of religion for a Western bias.

As a consequence of all this, I would plead jointly with Professor Sharma for new orientations in the phenomenology of religion. We need, for instance, in-depth case studies that concentrate on what is or was "religiously" meaningful for given persons and groups coming from particular social and cultural traditions, in given situations and contexts. Such studies should concentrate on those life situations that, to the people concerned, have a "deeper" meaning. They uay reveal something of the often unspoken religious and cultural assumptions of a particular society, group or individual.

There is reason to pay special attention in such research to people living under conditions of oppression or as minorities, who may articulate their religion in particular ways. But emancipation move-

ments also need to be studied in this respect, since they may articulate the prevailing religion as a positive support of their aims or as an obscurantist tradition from which one must radically depart.

In history, but also and especially in modern times, religious practices and beliefs have been used as instruments for social coherence and political mobilization, with various strategies. Religions have been ideologized. However, although social and political meanings may take the place of religious ones, so that a religion may seem to have weakened or disappeared, this is not necessarily the case. On a deeper level of awareness, at least among some people, religious meanings are rarely completely lost, and they may reemerge when conditions have changed and when appeals are made to people's religious identity.

But we should end with the conclusions of Professor Sharma's book and his own view of phenomenological research on religion. He does not use the differences he found between phenomenologists of religion as an argument against the phenomenology of religion itself. On the contrary, he describes the phenomenological approach rather as a familial variety, a multi-faceted mosaic that finds itself somewhere between a strictly empirical and a purely philosophical study of religion. For him, the phenomenology of religion provides a fruitful solurion to the dilemma of "insider" versus "outsider" perspectives, opening to an in-between position. Finally, the phenomenology of religion allows for what he calls a "religious" but still scholarly study of religion, which is tuned to its object in order to grasp and understand and in a way enjoy it.

Throughout his book, Professor Sharma discusses problems and differing, sometimes extreme positions with great objectivity, impartiality, even serenity. He shows himself a scholar and thinker who maintains an independent, free position, in reasonable dialogue with others. Maybe our discipline has something to do with this ability to exchange views and to be open to common reflection. May this book contribute to a further maturing of the phenomenology of religion, born in Amsterdam and grown up in Leiden. A study like this one shows that it transcends the confines of "the West" in a shared research on meaning.

Additional literature to the bibliography:

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Berlin, 23 April 2001 Jacques Waardenburg

Preface

The study of religion has been on the horns of one dilemma or another since its inception, although it has somehow managed not to be gored by them, unless the sentiment just expressed is naively premature or hopelessly outdated. These dilemmas have assumed myriad forms that have dogged it at every step. They might even be variations of a fundamental dilemma that lies at its very heart.

The study of religion started out with the aim of being an objective and scientific enterprise,[1] with a grand flourish, soon to discover that, in the end, its subject matter is ineluctably and intensely subjective and humanistic; it embraced evolutionism only to find itself forced to ask: Human beings may evolve, but does God?; it promoted the comparative study of religion but found itself wondering if it was possible "to balance a profound commitment [to one's religion] with an equally profound desire to do justice to that to which the scholar is *not* specifically committed;"[2] it espoused the historical method and set out to winnow myth from fact, only to be told that myths are "uniquely" true for the believers; when it advanced the proposition that the "believer is always right" it soon found itself in a quandary when faced with the fact that "the believer may on occasion have been disastrously wrong;"[3] even when it tried to apply phenomenological (as distinguished from eidetic) reduction, it could not hold back the tide of reductionism; when it turned to hermeneutics, it found itself confronted with the hermeneutics of suspicion; when it proposed that we moderns need not become

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1 In conformity with what seems to have been the prevailing intellectual sentiment of the times, see Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 31; Van A. Harvey, "Hermeneutics," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 6, p. 280, etc.

2 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 229.

archaic to understand and be enriched by the archaic tradition,[4] it found the moderns being accused of enriching themselves at the expense of the archaic tradition; and so on. The attempts to resolve these dilemmas have generated a wide gamut of emotions and positions, from the frustrated isolationism of despairing incommensurability to the methodological optimism of dialogical communion. Thus these developments have led Claude Lévi-Strauss to conclude that "no common analysis of religion can be given by a believer and a non-believer, and from this point of view the type of approach known as 'religious phenomenology' would be dismissed."[5] As this book is about the phenomenology of religion, for which religious phenomenology may also do verbal duty, one might as well go home! Except if one happens to be keeping the company of Michael Pye, who holds out the hope of a "*shared* attempt to interpret the meaning of complex religions."[6]

4 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

5 Cited in Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 324. "Many religious people return the compliment when they consider the scholarly study of religion as a rather useless blind alley" (Michael Pye, "Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1:2–3 [1974], p. 107).

6 *Ibid.*, p. 123. Emphasis in the original.

Introduction

I

It might not be illogical to begin a book by stating its rationale. This euables the author to identify the reasons for writing it and provides the reader with criteria for judging it.

II

The study of religion, as we know it today, commenced in the 1860s.[1] In the 1960s, almost exactly a century after its commencement,[2] the phenomenology of religion came to so dominate the study of religion[3]

1 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Company, 1986), pp. 27–28.

2 Eric J. Sharpe dates this trend from "the publication in 1933 of Dutch scholar Gerardus van der Leeuw's book *Phänomenologie der Religion*" (*ibid.*, p. 221).

3 Hendrik Kraemer could already declare in 1960: "Phenomenology is at present the order of the day ... ." See W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion by the Late Prof. W. Brede Kristensen*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. xx. Also see Dag Hedin, *Phenomenology and the Making of the World* (Uppsala and Stockholm, Sweden: Almkvist & Wiksell, 1997). It is also worth noting that the "term phenomenology had been employed in the study of religion almost twenty years *before* it was ever used by Husserl" (George Alfred James, *Interpreting Religion: The Phenomenological Approaches of Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. Brede Kristensen, and Gerardus van der Leeuw* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995], p. 21, emphasis added. Also see p. 267); so also Ursula King: "The term 'phenomenology of religion' was first used by Chantepie de la Saussaye (in his *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 1887) prior to the development of Husserl's philosophy" ("Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* [Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983], Vol. I, p. 39).

as to virtually become a synonym for studying it,[4] almost marginalizing the expression "comparative religion."[5]

How? And why?

III

One may invoke the distinction between the insider and the outsider in the study of religion in order to comprehend this transformation. And one may, in this context, begin with the realisation that "the study of religion wrestles perpetually with the contrast of the 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives."[6] This realisation may then be supplemented by another – that for a century since the inception of the study of religion, the outsider's perspective had not only prevailed against but dominated over the insider's perspective in this prolonged arm-wrestling. To spin out the point metaphorically further: the arms of the insiders had additionally been twisted. The insider had also been stiff-armed during this period and, at times, even kept at an arm's length.

It is worth noting that both the insider and the insider's perspective were at a discount during this period.

Then there was a stirring. It began to be felt that the insider's perspective, far from being discounted, may need to be privileged. This is at least one way of interpreting this famous passage from Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* or *The Idea of the Holy*:

> The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no farther; for it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect

4 The term 'religious studies' also coincidentally and not insignificantly appeared around this time, see Kees Bolle, "Theorizing About Religion," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *The Sum of Our Choices: Essays in Honour of Professor Eric J. Sharpe* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996), p. 62.

5 Ninian Smart, "Comparative-Historical Method," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 3, p. 572.

6 Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., *World Religions: Eastern Traditions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 3.

> the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or, say, social feeling, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings.[7]

Otto, however, when he speaks of privileging the insider's perspective thus in 1917, spoke of the insider to religion *in general*. In due course, this insight was extended to privileging the insider's perspective within the various individual religious traditions themselves. This cue was picked up and developed by G. van der Leeuw in *Phänomenologie der Religion*, published in 1933, a work which can "be understood on a number of different levels."[8] At one level, it could be seen as extending Otto's insight from the realm of religion in the singular to religions in the plural, and as inviting the colleague or the student to follow in his footsteps. For "its basic religious category of 'holiness' (in which van der Leeuw acknowledged profound indebtedness to Söderblom and Otto alike) is one which *homo religiosus* himself at once understands, but which the academic mind has always regarded with some doubt, feeliug that there he is invited to embark on a hazardous voyage on a metaphysical ocean."[9]

The insider's perspective now occupied a less distant place on the horizon of religious studies, for it had moved from the stratosphere of religion per se into the atmosphere of concrete religious data, but it was still distant.

It was brought to a more proximate level by W. Brede Kristensen when he declared, first in Dutch "between 1910 and 1920,"[10] and then through the English translation of his work in 1960:

> We must understand that others are autonomous and spiritual individuals ... only after we have grasped this can we understand these people and their religion.[11]

7 Cited *ibid.*, p. 3.

8 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

9 *Ibid.*

10 See John B. Carman, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 14. The fact that we can only approximate what the believer knows need not deter us, for do we know ourselves? As the famous woman mystic from Kashmir, Lallā (fourteenth century), sings:

> Lord, myself not always have I known;
> Nay, nor any other self than mine.

(Louis Renou, ed., *Hinduism* [New York: George Braziller, 1962], p. 208). Lest

Thus, by the 1960s[12] the perspective of the insider (and along with it the insider) was at a premium. The wheel had turned full circle.

This paradigm shift occurred under the banner of the phenomenology of religion. "Being objective is a value...taught early in schools,"[13] in Western culture. To he told then, when one arrived at the university, that one must pay attention to the *subject* perhaps amounted to more than a paradigm shift, it amounted to a Copernican revolution!

IV

This is how the phenomenology of religion came to exercise the influence it enjoys. As to why it could do so, one may again proceed by reinforcing what has already been stated: that the distinction between the insider and the outsider is central to the study of religion. And as such, it allows for four fundamental models of communication: (1) from insider to insider; (2) from outsider to outsider; (3) from outsider to insider; and (4) from insider to outsider.[14]

The point may be clarified further with the help of the following diagram, which charts these four fundamental modes of religious discourse.

this citation be considered too mystical: van der Leeuw thought that the phenomenologist could not speak of God "Because God, to be grasped by phenomenology, would have to be either subject or object; and he is neither" (Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 232). Gerardus van der Leeuw also implies elsewhere, in another key, that in a way phenomenology may also become a way of understanding even *oneself* better, for the sympathetic experience involves the desire not only "to sympathize keenly and closely with experience other than one's own, but also with one's experience of yesterday, already become strange" (Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner [New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963], Vol. Two, p. 675).

12 George Alfred James, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 5.

13 Willard G. Oxtoby, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

14 For more on this see Katherine K. Young, "Introduction," in Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, eds., *Feminism and World Religions* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 18–21.

Insider ←	Outsider
↑↓	↑↓
Insider	→ Outsider

In the study of religion, these four combinations represent not merely logical combinations but chronological phases as well. While 'the religion of study,' which finds a prominent place in each religious tradition, was basically carried out between insiders and insiders, the initial phase in the study of religion was characterised by the opposite: it was carried out among ontsiders. With the educational penetration of the colonies by the West, however, the situation acquired an additional dimension: it came to involve communication from outsiders to insiders about the insider's own religion. Western orientalists, for example, explained at least to Westernized Hindus what Hinduism was. This dominance began to recede with the end of the age of imperialism and the need to engage the perspective of the insider came to be increasingly felt. The mode of communication from the insider to the outsider now came into play. It first assumed the form of sensitivity to the insider's view. Such a perspective was favoured, for instance, by both Mircea Eliade (of the Chicago Divinity School) and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (of the Harvard Divinity School), despite the difference in their conceptions of "phenomenological essences, with Eliade inclining more towards typological timeless essences and Smith towards the 'inner lived meanings of the participants' as yet another version of essences."[15]

Soon the need to display sensitivity to the insider's perspective gave way to a need to display such sensitivity to the insider himself (or herself). The relaxation of laws of immigration in the 1960s, to the West in general and to the United States in particular, resulted in a major influx of followers of non-Christian religions into the West. This, in due course, produced important consequences for the study of religion.

15 This insight, if it amounts to one, was initiated by the remarks of an anonymous reader. Also see Jacques Waardenburg, "The Category of 'Faith' in a 'New Style' Phenomenology of Religion," in C. Jouco Bleeker, Geo Widengren and Eric J. Sharpe, eds., *Proceedings of the XIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Stockholm 1970)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 305–316.

Eric Sharpe's formulation of the "response threshold" becomes helpful at this point.[16] He writes:

> A "response threshold" is crossed when it becomes possible for the believer to advance his or her own interpretation against that of the scholar. In classical comparative religion this was hardly a problem since most of the scholar's time was spent in investigating religions of the past. Interpretations might be challenged, but only by other specialists working according to Western canons and conventions. Today, by contrast, a greater proportion of study is devoted to contemporary, or at least recent, forms of living traditions ... The response threshold implies the right of the present-day devotee to advance a distinctive interpretation of his or her own tradition – often at variance with that of Western scholarship – and to be taken seriously in doing so.[17]

It is obvious that phenomenology of religion, as an approach to the study of religion, was, and is, better equipped than other methods to deal with this development.

V

These developments seemed to submerge the "objective" pole in the study of religion for the time being, as the tidal wave of 'phenomenology' swept across the field. But it did not sink it. This wave of phenomenology had crested by the 1980s. Once again that "abiding issue"[18] in the academic study of religion – the (conscious) roles of

16 See Arvind Sharma, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 4.

17 Eric J. Sharpe, "Study of Religion: Methodological Issues," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 14, p. 81.

18 Willard G. Oxtoby, *op. cit.*, p. 3. On the durable nature of the debate see Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999). One explanation of the abiding nature of this issue may be offered in the following terms: "the problems of hermeneutics are more unavoidable in the scholarly study of religion than in many other academic disciplines, for reasons both conceptual and historical. Conceptually, religions themselves may be regarded as communities of interpretation, so that the scholarly study of them takes the form of an interpretation of an interpretation. Since the scholarly interpretation of religion most often rests on different assumptions than the religious interpretation, the religious participant frequently regards the scholar's interpretation as reductionistic and

the outsider and the insider in the study of religion – resurfaced, and continues to be a feature of the seascape of religious studies today.

Willard G. Oxtoby summarises the current situation well when he writes:

> For more than two generations since Otto wrote those words [cited earlier][19], the argument has often been made that there is no substitute in religion for the faith of the adherent. Often, however, the discussion has confused information and analysis. Testimony is one thing, and cross-examination is another. A participant may, hut also may not, be able to identify the assumptions on which a tradition rests, or the major transitions it has undergone. A participant may, but also may not, be able to describe fairly a variety of interpretations of the tradition offered by different sectors of the community.
>
> At the opposite pole from Otto is the view that the only hope for scholarly credibility is to be found in the outsider's 'objective' detachment from religion and its claims. Stated in the extreme, one has lost that credibility if one even says a kind word about religion. Indeed, among scholars of religion are quite a few who have become profoundly alienated from the faith communities in which they were raised. And in the study of the major traditions of Asia, many significant findings have been achieved by outsiders – Westerners – some of whose pioneer figures did not even set foot in the lands about which tbey wrote. An outsider may not, but also may, have something important and useful to say about a religious tradition.[20]

The reader should not form the impression that Oxtoby grabs the objective pole alone, for he also acknowledges: "Theorists today tell us that objectivity as a goal is in principle impossible. Some even say that there is no such thing as objective truth; there are only people's status-related and class-determined interests."[21] He also urges on his own: "We should recognize that every attempt at a historical account is a selection of material, and in that sense is an interpretation. Even

alien. Hence a perennial debate among scholars of religion regarding the degree to which the scholarly interpretation of religion must do justice to the believer's own point of view" (Van A. Harvey, "Hermeneutics," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987], Vol. 6, p. 282, emphasis added).

19 See above pp. 2–3.

20 Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

if it were theoretically possible to describe something 'objectively', the choice to describe that thing and not something else can hardly be justified as objective."[22]

One could say, by drawing a distinction between "material" and "method,"[23] that during the period from 1960 to 1980 the phenomenological method enormously enlarged and improved the quantity and quality of material available for the study of religion. It achieved this result by incorporating the insider's perspective into its data-base in a major way.[24] Once this task was accomplished, however, the insider-outsider debate once again came to the fore. In these debates the phenomenological standpoint tends to side with the insider's perspective epistemologically, without necessarily endorsing it ontologically, and thus tries to resist what might appear to be reductionistic excesses in the field, while drawing a distinction between methodological reductionism, on which it has something to say, and ontological reductionism, which falls outside its mandate on account of the need for exercising phenomenological reduction.

The 1980s also witnessed the increasing influence of postmodernism in the study of religion. Here again phenomenology of religion stakes out interesting positions, as will be obvious from its views on relativism.[25] One can, for instance, distinguish among three kinds of relativism: (1) inevitable relativism; (2) radical relativism; and (3) relative relativism. Consider a T.V. set in a room, to illustrate the differences. Any view one has of the T.V. must be from "somewhere," from some point in the room. This kind of relativism is inevitable and therefore may be described as inevitable relativism.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 2. Also see Arvind Sharma, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 3.

24 "Another concern of the Dutch school was the attempt to grasp the significance of a complex of religious data from the point of view of the believer or participant himself. *This was a very important intention and has much in common with the aims of field work in anthropology*" (Michael Pye, "Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1:2–3 [1974], p. 110, emphasis added). This phenomenological concern is analogous with the concern for "authorial intention" in hermeneutics, see Van A. Harvey, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, pp. 281–282.

25 Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996), Chapter 11.

The claim that because all positions from which the T.V. can be viewed are after all merely different "positions," and that therefore there is really no difference among them, would serve as an example of radical relativism. To maintain, however, that although all positions from which the T.V. may be viewed are relative, some positions are *better* situated for viewing a T.V. screen than others, could then be characterised as relative relativism. In this way, even within the vertiginous world of postmodernism, phenomenology of religion tends to relatively privilege the insider's perspective.

VI

No substantial study of the phenomenology of religion seems to be available whose *primary focus is the method itself*, despite such historical and contemporary relevance of the phenomenology of religion. This book is an attempt to meet this need. It attempts to trace its origins; link its numerous intellectual connections; pinpoint its basic features; identify its numerous nuances; winnow its manifold claims; and constellate its general position within the broader firmament of religious studies.

Part of the problem here may lie with the expression "phenomenology of religion" itself, which creates the impression of a mysterious entity. The term may have made its own dubious contribution to the Babelization of religious studies and is quaint at best. "It has meant many things in the past, and is sometimes still used to refer vaguely to all of these things."[26] Moreover, the attempts to define it raise their own difficulties, and, in an ongoing field, such attempts trap one in the paradox of trying to define what is examined prior to its definition.[27] Nevertheless, whatever one might think of the term, the master-idea it embodies is a significant one: that religion

26 Michael Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

27 A similar issue seems to stalk the comparative-historical method: "The other main problem with the comparative-historical method concerns definition. This is a complex problem, for if it is not possible to gain a common definition of religion, can we be sure that we are talking about a 'religious factor' in human affairs? Perhaps this factor is merely a chimera based on the conventions of European languages" (Ninian Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 572).

must also be understood in terms of the believers' gaze and not just our own; that one must see eye to eye with the believer before one subjects him or her to a critical gaze; and that a sympathetic withinness in relation to another religion can be cultivated as surely as a detached withinness towards one's own.

To say this is not to deny either the value or the validity of other modes of study or research. But it does imply, that, to be exclusively textual or historical about religion is to deny its wholeness, as surely as to be excessively empirical is to deny its wholeness. Nor should the fact that we can only approximate the believers' stance deter us. This involves yet another paradox: *we* would have to become the other person in order to understand him or her *fully*! But if this happens, the very epistemic distance presupposed by the effort to understand is abolished, and with it the need to understand. One should not, however, feel paralysed by such paradoxes, for to confront such paradoxes is to expose oneself to reality.

It seems only fair to warn the reader of a limitation this book is subject to, in this last paragraph. This book is concerned with the phenomenology of religion largely as it is known and practised in the English-speaking world. The author was born and educated in India, an erstwhile British colony now in recovery. He was baptised into religious studies in the United States and his pedagogical career has taken him to Australia and Canada. He has therefore moved within the orbit of the English-speaking world. The present book reflects this fact and its limitations, although "it is difficult to delineate neat geographical boundaries for the study of religion."[28]

[28] Ursula King, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

CHAPTER I

The Search for Terminological Exactitude: Phenomenon

The first known use of the word *phenomenology* has been traced by Richard Schmitt to Johann Heinrich Lambert, a contemporary of Kant, who, in his *Neues Organon*, published in Leipzig in 1764, used that term to characterise the discipline he had developed.[1] The first known use of the term *Phenomenology of Religion* is traced by Eric J. Sharpe to the Dutch scholar P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920), who used it in his *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (*Handbook of the History of Religion*), which appeared in 1887. He is credited with coining that expression in the form *die Phänomenologie der Religion*,[2] although it has been claimed that the term is "older than this handbook."[3] However, just as the expression *phenomenology* precedes the expression *phenomenology of religion* by over a century, the appearance of the word *phenomenon* precedes that of phenomenology by several centuries, in such expressions as "this strange Phainomenon," which is documented in England in 1639, an earlier usage attributed to 1576 being considered erroneous.[4] It seems that by the time the word caught on in the United States, it had

[1] Richard Schmitt, "Phenomenology," in Paul Edwards, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company and Free Press, 1967), Vol. Six, p. 135. Also see Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984, second impression; first published 1960), p. 11.

[2] Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1986), p. 222; also see Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, p. 276.

[3] C. J. Bleeker, *The Sacred Bridge* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), p. 2.

[4] *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961; first published 1933), Vol. VII, p. 772.

already become freighted with philosophical significance, although it is a point difficult to determine with certainty.[5] It had already begun to acquire that meaning in Europe, and if the sense in which it appears in the expression "phenomenology of religion," as it is usually understood, is to be appreciated, three manoeuvres are required: first, one must identify the early evolution of its sense on the Continent until approximately 1800; second, distinguish among the senses it acquired in the U.K. roughly between 1800 and 1900; and third, reconnect with its new-found sense on the Continent again. These manoeuvres may now be performed.

The first person to be considered in this context is Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant himself "used the word 'phenomenology' only twice, but he gave a new and broader sense to 'phenomenon,' that, in turn, resulted in a redefinition of 'phenomenology.'"[6] However, here we are concerned only with the use of the word 'phenomenon.' As is well-known, "Kant distinguished objects and events as they appear in our experience from objects and events as they are in themselves, independently of the forms imposed on them by our cognitive faculties. The former he called 'phenomena'; the latter 'noumena' or 'things-in-themselves.' All that we can ever know, Kant thought, are phenomena."[7]

5 Philip Babcock Gove, Editor-in-Chief, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1961), p. 1696.

6 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 135. On Kant's use of phenomenology per se, see Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8, 11.

7 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 135. This Kantian position heavily influenced the early presentation of Hindu Advaita philosophy to the West, see Paul Deussen, *The System of the Vedānta*, trans. Charles Johnston (Chicago: Open Court, 1912), passim. On a very significant difference between the unknowability of a thing in itself and Advaita Vedānta see M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p. 163. For Edmund Husserl's critique of Kantian unknowability see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Royce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 150, etc. On Indian philosophy and philosophical phenomenology in general see D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Lester Embree and Jitendranath Mohanty, eds., *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1992); also see G. Srinivasan, *The Phenomenological Approach to Philosophy: Indian and Western* (Delhi: Caravan Publishing Co., 1980), etc.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) reacted against this position, and in fact "was at great pains to show that this was a mistake."[8] He elucidated his argument in what is regarded as his "first major work," known in its English translation as the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), in which he argued that a thing could be known progressively through its various manifestations. A conclusion could be phrased either in terms of the mind knowing itself or the essence being known through its manifestations, as is clear from the following two statements of his position: (1) "Phenomenology is the science in which we come to know the mind as it is in itself through the study of the ways in which it appears to us;"[9] (2) "Phenomenology is the science by which the mind becomes aware of the development of the Spirit and comes to know its essence – that is, Spirit as it is in itself – through a study of its appearances and manifestations."[10] The essential point to note is that, unlike Kant, Hegel claimed that one could come to know the thing in itself through its appearances.

This completes the first manoeuvre, in which the understanding of the word phenomenon is dominated by the distinction between "appearance" and "what appears," and the nature of the relationship between the two.

The scene now shifts to the U.K., where the second manoeuvre was in progress. The view began to gain ground that phenomenon was what appeared, without introducing the deeper metaphysical question as to its ontological status. Indeed, in the U.K., by "the middle of the nineteenth century the definition of 'phenomenon' was further extended until it became synonymous with 'fact' or 'whatever is observed to be the case,'" ultimately imparting to phenomenology the sense of "a purely descriptive study of any given subject matter."[11] It is significant that in its very first use by Johann Heinrich Lambert, it was defined as a "theory of illusion."[12] Now phenom-

8 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

11 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

12 *Ibid.*, Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 273. However, see Thomas Ryba, *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), Chapter II; also see p. xiii, note 2.

enon stood for fact, and phenomenology, for the description of facts. This radical departure in sense must be remarked and was the consequence of the use of the word phenomenon by a series of scholars, notably, William Hamilton and Eduard von Hartmann. It should be clearly noted, for instance, that, for William Hamilton, philosophy was "*the* preeminent science"[13] and only after Hamilton was satisfied that his philosophical concerns had heen met did he "engage in an exposition of phenomenology."[14] Hamilton interpreted philosophy "as knowledge of what knowledge is,"[15] anticipating phenomenology's subsequent self-definition as "consciousness of what consciousness is." However, as this self-reflexivity was directed towards philosophy itself rather than phenomenology, phenomenology for Hamilton did not participate in it. Consequently, Hamilton understood phenomenology "as a method which leads to nomological and ontological ends. *But its own end*, description, is fulfilled when phenomenology achieves the descriptive project initiated by some field of knowledge. If a physicist asks what series of appearances constitutes what is meant by an atom, then phenomenology fulfils its task of providing a description. Notice, however, that phenomenology has to do with these appearances only."[16]

It should be clearly noted, moreover, that when it was adopted by C.S. Peirce (1839–1914), the word phenomenon meant whatever appeared as such, so that phenomenology was "not only a descriptive study of all that is observed to be real but also of whatever is before the mind – perceptions of the real, illusory perceptions, imaginations, or dreams." In other words, "it was the task of phenomenology to develop a list of categories embracing whatever can he included in the widest possible meaning of 'to be.'" Richard Schmitt credits Peirce with introducing this sense of the term in 1902.[17]

The distinction between the original Continental and the new Anglo-American sense will not be lost upon the reader. Whereas in the first case the issue turned on the relationship of appearance and

13 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
14 *Ibid.*
15 *Ibid.*
16 *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89, emphasis added.
17 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

reality, the issue now was transformed into one of description and its fidelity.

One is now ready for the third manoeuvre: The move back to the Continent early in the 20th century, when the Husserlian phenomenological project was launched, as it were, in 1905. But before this step is taken, two important continuations of the trends, set in motion by the Anglo-American and particularly British understanding of phenomenon, must be noticed. The first is the emphasis on description and the second the bracketing of the truth or falsity of the phenomena observed. The convergence of these was to account for the development of a particular kind of phenomenology of religion, sometimes referred to as descriptive phenomenology. I believe Eric J. Sharpe alludes to this when he writes, after concluding a section, on the "methodological embarrassment" involved when the phenomenology of religion begins to look for "objective eidetic visions," which must in some sense be subjective:

> There is, however, one species of 'phenomenology' which perhaps escapes from the methodological dilemma by refusing to concern itself too deeply with 'religion-as-such'. The species in question is perhaps best characterised as the 'comparative monograph', in which a study of one phenomenon, or one group of phenomena, is undertaken 'across the board'. In the English-speaking world the trend was set in the early part of the century by the thematic articles in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, since when there have been very many such studies, in most of the European languages. A well-known German example would be Heiler's *Das Gebet* (1918), while in England, E.O. James was for many years a specialist in this type of study – covering kingship, sacrifice, high gods, and so forth. Also in this category come several books by S.G.F. Brandon (1907–1971), among them *Time and Mankind* (1951), *Man and his Destiny in the Great Religions* (1962), *History, Time and Deity* (1965) and *The Judgment of the Dead* (1967).[18]

Thomas Ryba's recent claim, that the phenomenology of religion reclaim its rightful role as providing scientific description, is in line with this trend. Ryba surveys the use of both the word and the

18 Eric. J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 246; but see Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), pp. 19–20.

method of phenomenology in the case of seven scholars: Johann H. Lambert, John Robison, Georg W. F. Hegel, William Hamilton, William Whewell, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Edmund Husserl. The results of his survey are worth citing. First of all, he detects an ambiguity in the use of the word phenomenology as a science or as a method. He is able to conclude, on the basis of his survey, that "though philosophers have different ways of defining 'science' and phenomenology's inclusion or exclusion under the disciplines and methods which science denotes, nevertheless five of the thinkers – Peirce and Hegel being exceptions – make phenomenology a form of method. Husserl, in contrast to others, makes phenomenology both a method and a science. Phenomenology, interpreted as method, is a means to achieve clear insights into the nature of phenomena and to develop descriptions which provide the matter for other methods concerned with causal explanation and theory."[19]

Difficulties arise in the case of scholars who make a science of phenomenology. Hegel veers off into idealism, and because Peirce and Hegel define phenomenology "as a science but then generalize its subject matter to include any phenomenon," in the "Peircean and Husserlian conceptualizations" phenomenology is "left to founder as a science without moorings."[20]

It must be recognised, in order to make the transition back to the Continent in terms of understanding the term 'phenomenon,' that the distinction between the Anglo-American usage identified in the nineteenth century, and the Continental trend in the early twentieth century, does *not* rest on the fact that the Anglo-American usage accepted only actual facts as real, whereas for Husserl's movement "real" and "unreal" objects were to be placed on the same level.[21] C. S. Peirce was quite explicit on this point. The point, however, needs to be revisited, for the question is bound to arise: if the Anglo-American understanding of phenomenon was so similar to that across the straits, then how did this emphasis get so much more bang for its buck in Europe? The reason is that "since Husserl employed the term in early 1900s, it has become the name of a way of doing

19 Thomas Ryba, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
20 *Ibid.*
21 Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 710.

philosophy – by using the phenomenological method."[22] This, however, is not the whole story, although the centrality of the distinction between the term phenomenology being used for any descriptive study and as a philosophical method has recently been endorsed once again.[23]

The difference in emphasis here leads almost to a difference in kind. First, in the expression 'description of phenomenon' the emphasis shifts to phenomenon, and then ricochets to description, so that the richness and variety of the phenomenon in itself is no longer a prelude to explanation[24] but constitutes a celebration in itself. In Spiegelberg's memorable sentence: "If one likes to stick to barber shop language, one might thus contrast Occam's razor with Husserl's phenomenological brush: its function would be both to remove foreign bodies and to refurbish the genuine phenomena without pulling them from their roots."[25] Second, for Husserl, the phenomenological method was not meant to be one philosophical method among others, it was to be *the* philosophical method. Western philosophy had for too long focused either exclusively on the subject or on the object and become anemic by overlooking the fact that its lifeblood lay, as it must lie, in the relationship between the two. The phenomenological method was a foundational method[26] – for it focused on phenomenon. Phenomenology, like electricity, lay neither in the pole of the subject or the object – it was the charge connecting the two and had to be charged with it.

The slogan, which celebrated these new emphases on phenomenon, was *Zu den Sachen*:

> Literally translated, this slogan means "To the things!" where "things" must be taken in the widest possible sense to embrace all possible kinds

22 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
23 Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 274.
24 Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion: Eight Modern Descriptions of the Essence of Religion* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 6–7. On the distinction between explanation and interpretation see Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 63–65, etc.
25 Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 681.
26 Richard Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

of objects. Like other slogans, moreover, this one gains its force from having more than one meaning. If a German says to someone, "Zur Sache!" he is exhorting him, as we would say, "to get down to business." "Zu den Sachen!" admonishes one to get down to the proper business of the philosopher by examining and describing all kinds of objects in the particular way that reveals them as phenomena.[27]

To begin with, for example, what phenomena are to be included in the phenomenology of religion will have to be re-examined, if this slogan is taken seriously. As Geo Widengren notes, "monuments of art" have been rarely used as phenomena in religion (as compared to ritual, texts, etc.).[28]

The very 'richness' of phenomenon, when applied to religion after the emergence of the phenomenology of religion, was destined ultimately to lead to an "embarrassment of riches"[29] (hardly something to be really embarrassed about),[30] while the fact of its appeal to phenomenon would lead some to claim that it is empirical, and others to claim that it is anything but![31]

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27 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

28 Geo Widengren, "An Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion," in Walter H. Capps, ed., *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972), p. 147.

29 Jacques Waardenburg, *Reflections on the Study of Religion: Including an Essay on the Work of Gerardus van der Leeuw* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), passim; Ninian Smart, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

30 See Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1973), Vol. I, pp. 72–73, Part Five.

31 Lauri Honko, ed., *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology. Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, held in Turku, Finland, August 27–31, 1973* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), Part Two.

CHAPTER II

The Search for Terminological Exactitude: Phenomenology of Religion

I

Sometimes the best way to begin talking about a subject is to begin by not talking about it at all. The pitfalls of such an approach, especially when overdone, are rather obvious, but it does seem to be a good way to begin a discussion on the phenomenology of religion. To start with, we shall not talk about phenomenology at all – rather we shall talk about *phenomenon* once again.

As is well known, the word phenomenon is derived from the Greek verb PHAINEΣTHAI[1] which means "to be shown, to seem, to appear,"[2] and "can be used with or without the implication that the thing perceived is other than what it appears to be."[3] The same holds true of the *noun*, phenomenon. Thus, in Aristotle's ethics, the "apparent good"[4] is what seems good to a person, despite whether it is really good or not.[5] In *Greek philosophy*, in general, "phenomena are the objects of senses, sights and sounds contrasted with real objects apprehended by the intellect."[6] In *later Greek philosophy*, *phenomena* are observed facts as contrasted with theories devised to explain them.[7] Ever since the rise of modern science, in the *early 17th century*, scientists have used the word phenomena for observed facts

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1 Patrick Horace Nowell-Smith, "Phenomenon," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1973), Vol. 17, p. 812.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

which they sought to explain – a use still current in modern science.[8] It is now time to make the important point that although the expression "the science of religion,"[9] or *Religionswissenschaft*,[10] is often met with in the study of religion, the word *phenomena* is rarely understood in the strictly scientific sense in these usages. It *may* be used to refer to factual historical data about religion, as, for instance, in the sociology of religion,[11] but more generally, in the study of religion, and especially in the phenomenology of religion, this is not usually the case. Its use in the study of religion is *not* to be taken in this sense. Its use in the study of religion in general, and in the phenomenology of religion in particular, is more in line with the use of the word phenomena[12] in modern philosophy than in modern science. In modern philosophy, the word phenomenon is often used "for what is immediately apprehended by the senses."[13] For instance, the word phenomenon is used as the English translation for the German ERSCHEINUNG ("appearance"),[14] which is Kant's word for the immediate object of sensory intention, the bare *datum* which becomes an object only when interpreted through the categories. Thus, in a Kantian sense, *phenomenon* is used for the object interpreted through the categories, as opposed to *noumenon* – the thing-in-itself to which categories do not apply.[15]

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8 *Ibid.*

9 See Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1973), pp. 86, 96, 105, etc.; Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), pp. 215–219 passim; etc.

10 See Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 509–519; J. G. Arapura, *Religion as Anxiety and Tranquillity* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1972), p. 31, etc.

11 See Roland Robertson, *Sociology of Religion* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 11–16 passim.

12 "The word 'phenomenon' has acquired a meaning distinctively historical and empirical in import. It conjures up the facts disclosed through appearance and manifestation. Yet the prime connotation of the term will vary in line with the particular science or philosophy involved" (Edward J. Jurji, *The Phenomenology of Religion* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963], p. 1).

13 Patrick Horace Nowell-Smith, *op. cit.*, Vol. 17, p. 812.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

But although one might justifiably say that the word phenomena in the study of religion (in general) and in the phenomenology of religion (in particular) has greater affinity with the use of the word phenomena in modern philosophy as opposed to modern science, it must now be pointed out, that, even so, its use in the study of religion must be distinguished from its use in modern philosophy, because although in modern philosophy the word is sometimes used for what is apprehended by the senses, it never becomes a technical term.[16] Most philosophers prefer to use special words. One such special word is PHENOMENOLOGY. It is to the analysis of this word that we must now turn.

II

The clues to the meaning of the term phenomenology, in the expression phenomenology of religion, are first provided by the use of the word in modern philosophy and psychology, wherein it is used to "denote a study of the *forms* in which something appears or is manifested as opposed to the studies of causal origins, real constitution, significance etc. which go beyond what is apparent."[17] Thus Hegel uses the word phenomenology in his book entitled: *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, to stand for "a study of the *forms* assumed by the mind or the spirit in its development towards complete self-consciousness."[18] This association of phenomenology with form, or morphology of sorts, is worth keeping in mind. Another dimension to the word is provided by the fact that the term is used in contemporary psychology to "cover descriptions of direct personal experience as opposed to accounts based on observation of behaviour."[19] Typical of this approach is a work like David Katz's *The World of Colour* (1935) which deals with the varying ways in which colours appear to the percipient, i.e., "as spread over surfaces, as filling spaces, as lustrous, as a property of lighting, etc."[20]

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16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

One may now cast a backward glance at the preceding discussion before moving on to the next major argument. Such a glance reveals that three aspects had become associated with the word phenomenology by now:

(1) It is a study of something which appears or is manifested in one's awareness. It is in that sense subjective as opposed to being objective.
(2) It is a study of the forms in which this appearance takes place, as opposed to its causal origins, real constitution, etc.; and
(3) it is more concerned with the participant's perception of the situation and his or her account of it, as opposed to an outsider's perception of the participant's behaviour and account thereof.

III

No discussion of the term phenomenology, however, can be complete without a reference to Edmund Husserl (1859–1938),[21] to whom the word by and large owes its current prominence.[22] The term is used by Husserl in the sense of an a priori psychological discipline which, in studying the ways in which objects appear in the mind, should provide the foundation for all empirical psychologies.[23] We are here not concerned with Husserl's philosophy in general, only with two aspects of it:

(1) the method of what he calls pure phenomenology, in the light of its subsequent role in the study of religion; and
(2) the extension of this method by his disciples to the field of religion just as it was extended to aesthetics, etc.

There are two key words which appear in the discussion of the pure phenomenology by Husserl. These are EPOCHE and EIDETIC VISION.

21 See Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl, An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967); Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl, Philosopher of Infinite Tasks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); etc.

22 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

23 Maurice Natanson, *op. cit.*, Chapters 5 and 6.

First *epoché*. Phenomenology, according to Husserl, requires that

> we should practice doubt in regard to all common-sense beliefs, that one should put them all in brackets, subject them to a transcendental suspension or epoché. *Without ceasing to believe in them, one should put one's belief in them out of action.* In this suspension of conviction, consciousness itself becomes highlighted, the mere existence of houses, trees, men etc. being tantamount to the existence of one's awareness of them. This inner perception within ourselves does *not* mean a 'secondary empirical perception of our own mental acts which is tacked on to the acts themselves but is a part of the perception itself.'[24] Thus, it is a part of the perception. '[O]ur suspension of the conviction in regard to the natural–empirical world' is connected with 'our inner perception of our own conscious dealings with it.'[25]

Next, the eidetic vision. Husserl

> does not make the *object of a mental act an actual part of it*: to be concerned in thought with God Jupiter, is not to have God as an actual element in one's concern. Nor does concern with an object entail its extramental existence anywhere: its status may be merely *intentional*, it may be merely the case that we have no relation between a mental act and something lying outside it: concern with an object is something self-sufficient and complete, to live through it is to have its object before one, whether the object has any further real status or not.[26]

In other words, it is what appears in one's awareness that one must focus on practising epoché regarding its external existence or otherwise and this internal awareness itself of this manifestation in internal awareness is of the essence.

These two words and the concepts which they embody – epoché and eidetic vision – constitute the hard core of pure phenomenology. Adopted as a method, they were applied by Husserl to both outer and inner perception and to external nature, and by his disciples to various other fields. "Husserl's followers Max Scheler, Martin

24 This enables this procedure to be distinguished from that of *anuvyavasāya*, with which students of Indian philosophy may be familiar. See M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p. 251.

25 *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1961), Vol. 17, p. 701.

26 *Ibid.*

Heidegger, Fritz Kaufmann, Oskar Beeker and Gerhart Husserl developed a concrete phenomenology of emotional aesthetic, ethical, religious, social and juridical spheres."[27] Phenomenology "can always deal with an object of consciousness."[28]

IV

It is clear that, in Husserl's approach, the emphasis lies on the experience itself – not so much on the object experienced or even on the subject experiencing it, but rather on his or her *subjective experience*. From this point of view, then, the extension of the phenomenological approach, *as a direct lineal descendant* from Husserl (and this is important)[29] meant that the study of religion proper must be the study of subjective religious experience. Such an extension was carried out by Max Scheler (1874–1928),[30] who distinguished between two brands of phenomenologies of religion: (1) "the *concrete* phenomenology of religious objects and acts" and (2) "ideological and *essential* phenomenology of religion, such as envisage the 'essence' of the act or object. This because it seeks to understand as fully as possible the meaning of one or a number of religious constructs, and attempts an intelligent reconstruction of the acts through which their meanings were or are transmitted."[31] This *essential* phenomenology of religion was seen as possessing three ends: "(1) the essential nature of the divine; (2) the study of the forms of revelation in which the divine intimates and manifests itself to man; (3) the study of the religious act through which man prepares himself to receive the content of revelation, and through which he takes it to himself in faith."[32]

27 *Ibid.*
28 *Ibid.*
29 But see Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion, A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1975), pp. 223–224 and p. 242, note.
30 Jacques Waardenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 654.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 657.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 659.

V

Several scholars, C. J. Bleeker the most prominent among them,[33] have pointed out, however, that what we today mean by the phenomenology of religion has such tenuous links with the phenomenology of Husserl that it is best, in the interest of avoiding confusion, to regard the phenomenology of religion as having nothing to do with the phenomenology of Husserl. In a sense this is true, and it is helpful to note that W. Brede Kristensen (1867–1953), who is sometimes considered the first major phenomenologist of religion, makes no mention of Husserl nor does he use the terms *epoché* and eidetic vision. However, he insists that, as far as possible, "every religion ought to be understood from its own standpoint, for that is how it is understood by its own adherents."[34] He also advocates the use of "empathy" in trying to understand the beliefs of others.[35] One can clearly see here the phenomenological heritage at work, with echoes of Husserl. But Kristensen actually employs phenomenology in the senses identified prior to Husserl: (1) he focuses on the subjective experience of the believers, (2) he tries to classify the forms in which this subjective experience of the believers appears and (3) he tries to share the participant's perception of the situation through empathy. In the works of G. van der Leeuw (1890–1950) one finds a more open acknowledgement of the phenomenological tradition of Husserl.[36] He is cited, though perhaps only once,[37] and words such as *epoché*[38] make their appearance. Yet van der Leeuw's work lies not in the tradition of Max Scheler so much as in that of W. Brede Kristensen.

33 C. J. Bleeker, "The relation of the History of Religions to kindred sciences, particularly Theology, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* 1 (1954), pp. 147–148.
34 W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. J. B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 6.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
36 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
37 G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, p. 646, note 1; but also see Hans H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 61, note 6.
38 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, pp. 683–689 passim.

These developments led to the emergence of a phenomenology of religion, whose roots may intertwine with those of modern philosophy and psychology, but which emerged in its own right on the surface as an independent growth.

VI

For a further understanding of the concept of phenomenology in the study of religion it is best to realise that it is a *method* and not a field in the study of religion, and further that "the phenomenological study of religion" – as a method – "involves the twin attempt to (i) bracket off presuppositions or potential conclusions about the truth, falsity, value or otherwise of a religion and (ii) grasp its significance for those who believe or participate in it."[39]

This method, however, is capable of being applied at several levels in religious studies, and, in its broadest sense, the term phenomenology of religion may be applied to the entire gamut of such applications. These applications may be briefly recapitulated:

(1) It could apply to "phenomenological philosophy devoted to the study of religion;"[40]

(2) the phenomenological method may be applied to a *type* of religious experience, such as Prayer, Sacraments or Sacrifice, etc. on the basis of data collected from several traditions. This is what the term phenomenology of religion has come to mean in one common locution. As such it includes much of the work done by W. Brede Kristensen, G. van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade and Joachim Wach.[41]

(3) Sometimes the phenomenological method is not restricted to a type of religious experience but is applied to an entire religious tradition as a whole, in the hope of disclosing its essence. Such an attempt was made in part by G. van der Leeuw[42] but has since been made more consciously by Edward J. Jurji.[43]

39 Michael Pye, "Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1:2–3 (June–September 1974), p. 115.

40 Joseph Debney Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), p. 1.

41 *Ibid.*

42 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Part Five.

43 Edward J. Jurji, *op. cit.*

(4) Sometimes the phenomenological method is applied to the phenomenon of religion itself. This brings the phenomenology of religion in close proximity to the psychology of religion and one becomes concerned with the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto, and their analysis of the nature of religious experience. In its broadest sense the work of Paul Tillich and Bronislaw Malinowski could also be accommodated here.[44]

As a result of the work of Kristensen, van der Leeuw and Eliade, the phenomenological method has also become associated with the search for the underlying *structure* of types of religious experience, in such a way as does not violate the self-understanding of the believers.[45] The incorporation of this element in the phenomenological methods permits the following further conclusions:

(5) The phenomenological method may also be identified at work in the analysis of the formal structure of religious experience, as in the case of John E. Smith[46] for example. The work of Max Scheler can be accommodated here as well,[47] as well as some works of Joachim Wach.[48]

(6) The phenomenological method may also be applied to the analysis of the structure of a religious tradition, as in the work of Ninian Smart.[49]

(7) An analysis of the essential structure of the religious situation,[50]

44 Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 169–183.

45 Arvind Sharma, "Towards a definition of the Phenomenology of Religion," *Milla wa-Milla* 16 (1976), p. 17.

46 John E. Smith, *Experience and God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

47 Typologically Max Scheler belongs here, though historically he should be placed in (1).

48 Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

49 Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London: The Fontana Library, 1969). As such it should also be capable of being extended to the structure of religious traditions but without an evaluative or evolutionary bias (see Kalidas Bhattacharyya, *Possibility of Different Types of Religion* [Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1975]).

50 The word "religious situation" as used here should be distinguished from the "theological situation" (which is the analysis of the human condition as offered by a *particular* religious tradition) and the "existential situation" (as understood

as in the work of J. G. Arapura,[51] also falls within the domain of the phenomenological study of religion. Some of the work of Mircea Eliade and Martin Buber could also be included here.[52]

(8) Scholars have more recently identified another connotation of the phenomenology of religion and labelled it the existential phenomenology of religion. Compared with its usual connotations

> [a] quite different motivation underlies the existential orientation in the phenomenology of religion. This strand presupposes both the hermeneutical and the existential turns phenomenology was to take away from Husserl's conception of a rigorously scientific philosophy; and it replaces Kant and Husserl with Heidegger and Kierkegaard as mentors for the phenomenology of religion. The hermeneutical critique, building on the late work of Husserl, becomes fully explicit in Heidegger. All our cognitions are interpretations whose own possibility presupposes our immersion in language, in culture and in history in such ways that the ideal of a purely scientific understanding, free from all particular perspectives and presuppositions, is a chimera. No phenomenology can have as its goal the preservation of scientific objectivism in a post-metaphysical context.[53]

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in existential phenomenology). We may, for instance, use the expression "theological situation" to refer to the explanation of the existential human condition offered by a particular religion. Judaism, at least in its early formulation, may identify this condition as reflecting the favour or disfavour of Yahweh, Christianity with the post-lapsarian human disposition towards sinfulness, and Islam with the wilful disregard of God's will as expressed through the Qur'ān. It is the tradition's explanation of why things have gone wrong or why they go wrong at the most general level. It has been offered as a generalisation, for instance, that the religions of the West tend to offer such an explanation largely in terms of "sin;" those of India in terms of "ignorance" and those of China in terms of "disharmony." The expression "existential situation" in the present context, implies the conscious recognition of the fact that the appreciation of the human condition has not been filtered either through a particular religious perspective or a religious standpoint in general.

51 J. G. Arapura, *op. cit.*

52 Joseph Debney Bettis, *op. cit.*, pp. 199–223.

53 Merold Westphal, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Edward Craig, General Editor, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), Vol. 7, p. 353. Also see Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984).

(9) Finally, one may also indicate the following connotation of the term, which brings phenomenology of religion close to the work of Robert Bellah.[54]

> ... phenomenology of religion has been understood as the history and development of religious consciousness in the course of time. Criteria are introduced in order to measure the particular 'stage' of a given religious phenomenon or religious orientation within the framework of a general structure of development of the religious consciousness or of consciousness as such.[55]

One may choose to view this version of its meaning as involving the structure of the religious experience of humanity *in history*.

The last two senses we deal with are the broadest and pertain to the relationship of phenomenology of religion to (1) religion itself and (2) *homo religiosus*, or the 'religious man or woman,' without departure from considerations of structure.

(10) Under this category of meaning of the expression phenomenology of religion "[t]he phenomenon of religion is ... comprehended basically by the means of an idea reflecting religion's basic structure. The procedure requires that this idea-structure be separated into its elements and that the concrete religious phenomena are then fitted into this schematic framework."[56] It would be cumbersome to provide an illustration of the approach here as it would interrupt the smooth cataloguing of the various senses. It is therefore provided in an endnote.[57]

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54 See Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964), pp. 358–374.

55 Jacques Waardenburg, *Reflections on the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), p. 120.

56 *Ibid.*

57 A good example of the application of this procedure is provided by Merold Westphal, who compares the differing perceptions of Gerardus van der Leeuw and Rudolf Otto on the structure of religion. He points out that "Gerardus van der Leeuw gives a triadic structure to his classic work *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* (1933): the object of religion, the subject of religion, and object and subject in their reciprocal operation. The object of religion, which he calls the sacred, is above all else power. But this power is not just any agency. Van der Leeuw stresses its remoteness. However

(11) It might also be noted that

> phenomenology of religion has been understood as being the distinction, discernment, and subsequent understanding of connections between religious data within the framework of what is held to be a basic structure of religious man. Different mentalities, attitudes or anthropological structures are distinguished with specific possibilities of thought and perception. Man's religious expressions are interpreted in their particular connections against the background of the idea of a *homo religiosus* and his basic nature and structure.[58]

This is quite apparent, for instance, in the work of Mircea Eliade.[59]

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frequently one encounters it, it never becomes usual or familiar, but remains a *highly exceptional* and *extremely dangerous* 'Other' ([1933] 1963 [1], p. 24). Accordingly encounters with the sacred are accompanied by amazement, fear, and especially awe" (*ibid.*, p. 354). It is important to note here that "In its generic sense, then, the sacred power 'remains merely dynamic and, not in the slightest degree ethical or 'spiritual'" (*ibid.*, pp. 354–355). However, in Otto's description of the numinous as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, "this complex 'object' of experience is not just a matter of power but also of value. Before the numinous I experience not only the limits of my power but also the limits of my worth. The notions of sin and defilement that emerge go beyond the notions of guilt and remorse derived from morality, just as holiness is not reducible to goodness; however, the value categories of religion are intimately related to those of morality. Over against van der Leeuw, Otto leaves us with two important and probably interrelated questions: Is the dialectical tension between attraction and repulsion generic to religion, or only a feature of some species? And is there an essential link between religion and morality, or is the supreme and unique value of the holy a specific rather than a generic feature of religion?" (*ibid.*, p. 355). The difference between the two approaches becomes apparent on the point of "distinction between religion and magic. If the sacred is a matter of value-free power, then it entails no normative restraints against making it a means to human ends. The only barriers are technical and the sacred power is on a par with atomic power: can we figure out safe and reliable procedures for putting this power at our own disposal? On Otto's view that the holy is a category of value, we should say at this point that we are no longer dealing with religion but with magic. On van der Leeuw's view, by contrast, we should speak here of instrumental religion, recognizing that phenomena we normally designate as religious sometimes have this means-end structure constrained by no values but our own purposes" (*ibid.*).

58 Jacques Waardenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

59 See David Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision of a New Humanism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

CHAPTER III

The Phenomenology of Religion

I

Considerable ambiguity surrounds the term "phenomenology of religion." The purpose of this chapter is to seek out the sources of this ambiguity and by laying it bare, hopefully, to remove it.

II

One may begin by conducting two preliminary operations: by documenting the fact that the expression "phenomenology of religion" is indeed ambiguous; and by demonstrating that, despite this ambiguity, there are some points regarding it around which there is general agreement. This would prepare the ground for accomplishing the elucidatory aim of this chapter.

III

We may begin by recognising that "phenomenology of religion has become something of a buzz word." Thus, Eric J. Sharpe remarks that, since the publication of Gerardus van der Leeuw's book *Phänomenologie der Religion*[1] in 1933, and its English translation as *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* in 1938,[2]

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1 For a more recent issue see Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (second edition) (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956).

2 For a more recent issue see G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), two volumes (first published London 1938).

the term 'the phenomenology of religion' has gradually acquired a certain vogue, and indeed now occupies in a few quarters, the kind of position once held by the older term 'comparative religion.' The label is, however, far from explanatory, and simply to use this form of words without further definition would be unwise, since even the scholars who use this term, and claim to apply this method to their work, are not always sure as to its precise definition. Moreover the general impression seems to have been conveyed here and there that it means little more than 'the sympathetic study of religion' – an assumption which is not false, but which is scarcely adequate.[3]

Remarks by other scholars, and in turn, the remarks of other scholars on them, only serve to confirm the confusion characterising the use of the term 'phenomenology of religion.' In 1969, J. D. Bettis edited a book entitled the *Phenomenology of Religion*,[4] in which the phenomenology of religion was defined as "an effort to focus the perception of religious symbolic data to the degree of clarity demanded by the sharply focused questions of the inquiring modern intellect."[5] Eric J. Sharpe remarks regarding this definition as follows:

> There is little that one can say, except that either the door has been thrown open to random subjectivity, or that a respectable scholarly ideal has disappeared behind a verbal mist. The aims of the book are so unclear that either interpretation seems equally feasible. Phenomenology may be more of an approach than a method, but there is no excuse for such treatment.[6]

This judgement is perhaps too severe given the state of the art itself, but it serves to confirm the impression of vagueness surrounding the term. A possible source of this state of affairs is perhaps the fact that phenomenology of religion can become a highly individual, if not personal, exercise, as a result of its emphasis on empathetic understanding. If phenomenology is what phenomenologists do, then

3 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd., 1986), p. 221.
4 Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion: Eight Modern Descriptions of the Essence of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).
5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
6 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

this can easily lead to a proliferation of meanings. As Willard G. Oxtoby points out:

> The phenomenologist is obliged simply to set forth his understanding as a whole, trusting that his reader will enter into it. But there is no procedure stated by which he can compel a second phenomenologist to agree with the adequacy and incontrovertibility of his analysis, unless the second phenomenologist's eidetic vision happens to be the same as the first's. For this reason phenomenological expositions of religion are in fact very personal appreciations of it, akin more to certain forms of literary and aesthetic criticism than to the natural or even the social sciences. As an approach phenomenology can be characterised, and yet when it is used for presenting phenomena there appear to be as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists.[7]

Some scope exists for identifying the basic features of this method, notwithstanding this mist of confusion surrounding the meaning of the term "phenomenology of religion." This fortunate result follows from the happy circumstance that by the term "phenomenology of religion" we really mean the phenomenological method in the study of religion. Just as by comparative religion we do not mean yet another religion, like Taoism or Shinto, but rather the comparative study of religion,[8] similarly by the expression phenomenology of religion we do not mean another field of application of the phenomenology, as understood in the philosophy of Husserl, but rather the phenomenological method in the study of religion.

Despite the difference regarding what constitutes "phenomenology of religion" there are certain aspects of the method, such as those mentioned below, which, if not by common consent then at least by consensus, are widely accepted as its distinguishing features:

(1) phenomenology of religion is thematic;
(2) phenomenology of religion is sympathetic;
(3) phenomenology of religion is value-free;
(4) phenomenology of religion investigates forms or structures;
(5) phenomenology of religion is interpretive.

7 Cited in Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 249.
8 S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), p. 202.

That the phenomenology of religion is, above all, thematic becomes clear from a perusal of the first few pages of the very first chapter of W. Brede Kristensen's book on the subject.[9] Kristensen begins by stating that "Phenomenology of Religion is the systematic treatment of the History of Religion. That is to say, its task is to classify and group the numerous and widely divergent data ..."[10]. How one proceeds to accomplish this task is soon explained.

> The corresponding data in different religions are very numerous. Completely unique phenomena hardly ever occur. Here is an example. Sacrifices take place in almost all religions, although in different forms. This cannot be accidental. How is this fact to be explained? The sacrificial acts evidently issue from a religious need of a very universal nature. How are we to become acquainted with this need? In any given religion perhaps only one particular conception of sacrifice is expressed. We wish to know more: what religious need has caused men, in all times and places, to present offerings to the gods? To learn this, we must study the category "sacrifices" in the various religions; we must pay attention to that which in the actions and conceptions of the various peoples is common to the basic idea of sacrifice.[11]

Next, the phenomenology of religion tries to adopt the insider's point of view. Kristensen speaks in this context of "an appeal made to the indefinable sympathy we must have for religious data which sometimes appear so alien to me,"[12] a sentiment endorsed by G. van der Leeuw.[13]

While adopting such a stance, the phenomenology of religion also desires to be value-free; it is non-judgemental. Winston L. King distinguishes between several approaches to the study of religion: (1) from within (i.e., the perspective of the devout believer); (2) from without (i.e., a perspective which views religion with detachment and even hostility); (3) semi-within (i.e., awareness of one's own faith

9 W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960).

10 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

13 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 675. Also see Winston L. King, *Introduction to Religion: A Phenomenological Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 8.

which includes an outside look of it, e.g., missionary); (4) semi-without (i.e., a perspective on one's own faith which includes the perspective of the outsider as well, e.g., a philosopher of religion).[14] Then King makes the following point:

> How shall we relate history of religions (or phenomenology of religions) in its perspective to the other perspectives thus far distinguished? It can best be described as the observation of religions from a detached withinness. In its methodology it is detached from any one particular religion; it does not speak from a Christian, Moslem, or Buddhist viewpoint. It is not directly concerned with passing truth or *value judgments* on one religion in contrast to another. However, it is still within religion in the general sense, that is, within religion as a whole. Its characterizing attitude is that of penetrative insight and sympathetic interpretation; it seeks to specify the authentically religious cultural factors and to understand their interrelation with each other in organic social-cultural structure.[15]

That the phenomenology of religion investigates form or structure is patent. As is well known, phenomenology of religion deals with appearances (*Erscheinungen*):

> The appearance, to continue, subsists as an image. It possesses backgrounds and associated planes; it is "related" to other entities that appear, either by similarity, by contrast, or by a hundred nuances that can arise here: conditions, peripheral or central position, competition, distance, etc. These relationships, however, are always perceptible relationships, "structural connections": they are never factual relationships nor causal connections. They do not, of course, exclude the latter, but neither do they enunciate anything about them; they are valid only within the structural relations. Such a relation, finally, whether it concerns a person, a historical situation or a religion, is called a type, or an ideal type.[16]

The passage is somewhat convoluted and tries to distinguish between "types" and "structures." But the thrust is clear. Phenom-

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–7. For more on the insider-outsider in religion see N. Ross Reat, "Insiders and Outsiders in the Study of Religious Traditions," and responses to it, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51:3 (September 1983), pp. 459–491.

15 Winston L. King, *op. cit.*, p. 7, emphasis added.

16 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 673.

enology does not unblinkingly contemplate a blank wall like a Bodhidharma; it seeks to discern underlying structures. But once identified, the structures have to be understood, comprehended, and interpreted for their meaning. Mariasusai Dhavamony elaborates this point with quotable clarity:

> Structurally similar religious acts, when compared, yield valuable meanings which explain the internal signification of these acts. The basic assumption in this approach is that the outward forms of human expression have an inner organizing pattern or configuration which can be outlined by the use of the phenomenological method. This method tries to find the structures that underlie historical facts and to comprehend them in their inner meaning as manifested through these structures with their laws and specific significations.[17]

The interpretive nature of the phenomenology of religion has deep roots, which intertwine with those of hermeneutics. It is their common interest in 'interpretation' which accounts for their becoming so closely aligned with each other as to appear virtually indistinguishable at times. As Katherine Young points out:

> Description of human cognitive and emotional life is never devoid of meaning, because it signifies something. Whereas some meanings are obvious and belong to surface phenomena, others belong to deep structure or less accessible layers of culture and therefore are implicit, obscure, or even hidden. This necessitates their uncovering or an inference of meaning from clues at hand.[18]

The link of phenomenology of religion with interpretation is even closer at hand than this passage might indicate. To the extent that phenomenology of religion is concerned with the effort to understand the religious experience of others, it has to deal with both their interpretation of their experience as well as with our understanding (and interpretation) of their experience. It is also worth noting that

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[17] Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Phenomenology of Religion* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1973), p. 26.

[18] Katherine K. Young, "Women's Studies and the Phenomenology of Religion," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women's Studies* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 47.

the believer's interpretation of his or her experience is *one* of several possible interpretations of the elements within the tradition and it is not merely the observable objects of this experience but a *specific* way of interpreting them which makes a tradition what it is. For instance, from one point of view, Christianity differs from Judaism precisely in *interpreting* Jesus as the Messiah and Judaism differs from it in choosing not to so interpret him.

If it now be accepted that the above-mentioned constellation of items offer an adequate preliminary description of the phenomenology of religion, then one may proceed further and indicate precisely why the smog of confusion hangs so heavily on the horizon of this method. This may be done, first, by indicating the area of study in which each particular feature of the phenomenology of religion identified above is rooted, and then, by indicating when precisely the phenomenology of religion extends itself beyond its proper domain in utilizing that feature (while still retaining the name). The label then does not do justice to the content, and confusion follows.

V

The thematic nature of the phenomenology of religion is not derived from any field; it is intrinsic to the phenomenology of religion. That the phenomenology of religion classifies historical data according to themes or types is one of the most frequently made and accepted statements in the field.[19] In fact, sometimes the so-called phenomenologists of religion do not venture very far beyond classification, which raises the question of the extent to which they are just descriptive comparative religionists and not phenomenologists. Such a question conld arise, for instance, in relation to the work of E. O. James (1886–1972) and A. C. Bouquet (1884–1976) but not in the case of S. G. F. Brandon (1907–1971).

The fact that the phenomenology of religion and descriptive comparative religion tend to approach each other (asymptotically?) should not lead to the confusion that the phenomenology of religion originated in descriptive comparative religion. It does bring itself in

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[19] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 241, 246.

relation to comparative religion but in such a way as to set itself off against it. Thus Kristensen even suggests that the word comparative religion could have been used for the phenomenology of religion, but for the fact that comparative religionists have historically made comparisons which are odious to the phenomenologist of religion, because they are evaluative, whereas the comparisons which the phenomenologist makes are non-evaluative.[20]

VI

The methodological item which emphasises the element of sympathy, or perhaps one should say empathy, registers the influence of Husserlian philosophy on the evolution of the phenomenology of religion. This becomes clear from a perusal of G. van der Leeuw's work. Thus at some points he speaks of retaining "the typical phenomenological intellectual suspense (*epoché*)"[21] and its Husserlian connection is obvious.[22] Elsewhere, van der Leeuw cites Husserl's disciple Max Scheler in a passage involving the idea of the eidetic vision.[23] This

20 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.

21 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 645, 675.

22 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 646, note 1: "The term *epoche* is a technical expression employed in current Phenomenology by Husserl and other philosophers. It implies that no judgment is expressed concerning the objective world, which is thus placed 'between brackets', as it were. All phenomena, therefore, are considered solely as they are presented to the mind, without any further aspects such as their real existence, or their value, being taken into account; in this way the observer restricts himself to pure description systematically pursued, himself adopting the attitude of complete intellectual suspense, or of abstention from all judgment, regarding these controversial topics."

23 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 675–676: "Phenomenology is concerned only with 'phenomena', that is with 'appearance'; for it, there is nothing whatever 'behind' the phenomenon. This restraint, still further, implies no mere methodological device, no cautious procedure, but the distinctive characteristic of man's whole attitude to reality. Scheler has very well expressed this situation: 'to be human means to hurl a forcible 'No!' at this sort of reality. Buddha realized this when he said how magnificent it is to contemplate everything, and how terrible it is to be. Plato, too, in connecting the contemplation of ideas to a diverting of the soul from the sensuous content of objects, and to the diving at the soul into its own depths, in order to find the 'origins' of things. Husserl, also, implies nothing different than this when he links the knowledge of ideas with 'phenomenological reduction' – that is a 'crossing through' or 'bracketing' of (the accidental) coefficients of the existence of objects in the world in order to obtain their 'essentia.'"

brings us to the consideration of some vital points.[24] The phenomenology of religion should *not* be confused with Husserlian phenomenology as a system of philosophy. It is true that the phenomenology of religion borrows the twin concepts of *epoché* and *eidetic vision* from Husserlian phenomenology[25] – but it does not mean that the phenomenology of religion is a branch of Husserlian philosophy. This question of the correct relation between Husserlian philosophy and the phenomenology of religion has been a source of great confusion and we owe it to C. J. Bleeker that he has taken pains to clarify the relationship.[26]

Those who search for the essence of a religion as phenomenologists of religion, however, have added to the confusion surrounding the term phenomenology of religion, notwithstanding their lofty motivation. The root of the problem lies in looking for an essence *beyond* the structure. Thus Robert D. Baird points out:

> According to Eliade, phenomenology of religion (the search for structures) seeks to understand the essence of religion. C. J. Bleeker sees this search as the final goal of the historian of religions as well. He concedes that the historian of religion proceeds with a certain notion of what religion is, but that his final goal is to determine the essence of religion.[27]

Baird calls this approach the essential-intuitional method and points out that it operates without a clear set of definitions. "If the

24 The extent of Husserl's influence on van der Leeuw is debated (see Lauri Honko, ed., infra, p. 145, note 4; p. 157, note 31).

25 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

26 Arvind Sharma, "An Inquiry into the Nature of the Distinction between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* 22 (1975), p. 82, note 4. Eric J. Sharpe (*op. cit.*, p. 237) also points out that the phenomenologists of religion "had adopted at least some of the vocabulary of Husserlian phenomenology, but their aims were simple. They wished to combine complete accuracy of scholarship with complete sympathy of treatment to ensure complete understanding of the religious beliefs and practices of other human beings."

27 Robert D. Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1971), p. 129.

question of definitions arises at all (and frequently it does not), it arises at the *end* of one's study, or perhaps even at the end of one's career."[28] When the phenomenology of religion gets involved in the matter of "essence," it seems to generate definitional confusion and to blur its boundary. Let us begin with C. J. Bleeker's rejection of a host of definitions to see how such definitional confusion is generated. Robert D. Baird points out that

> [i]n announcing the failure of a host of considered definitions, however, Bleeker does not sufficiently appreciate the circular method that is employed in attempts to determine the 'essence' of religion by an examination of historical data. To criticize a definition of religion, one requires a certain notion of what religion 'really is.' That is, one is laboring under the essential-intuitional approach which is a cryptic way of operating under another definition. To contend that one cannot define what is examined prior to its examination is contradictory. It is further to be questioned whether such a vague notion will suffice in enabling one to identify that for which he is looking. Such a procedure makes it difficult for fellow scholars to ascertain whether what is being examined is indeed religion, and, therefore, whether the 'resulting' definition is actually its 'essence.'[29]

It seems best if either the essence is identified with structure in the phenomenology of religion, or differentiated away from it, with phenomenology of religion confining its interest to structures. J. E. Barnhart's remarks apropos this issue, which he makes in the preface of his book *The Study of Religion and Its Meaning*, are interesting. He writes:

> A third school of philosophy that has had much to say about religion is phenomenology. In this book I do not so much do direct battle with this school as regard it as having run out of gas. The quest for the 'essence of religion' – like the quest for the Holy Grail – has nevertheless led to many interesting and fruitful adventures off the main trail. But today talk of finding the essence of religion is regarded as quaint at best. By contrast, neo-phenomenologists, speaking of 'structures' rather than essences, are eager to make use of social and behavioral sciences in

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

> exploring these structures. In so doing, they advance far beyond the purist Edmund Husserl.[30]

He also adds elsewhere that "even the phenomenological questions for 'essence' has given way to the new search for religious 'structures.'"[31] If this is so, then the phenomenology of religion, as we understand it, is back on track.

Another possible source of confusion here is the extent to which one is prepared to be sympathetic. Kristensen makes a very strong statement on this point:

> Let us never forget that there exists no other religious reality than the faith of the believer. If we really want to understand religion, we must refer exclusively to the believer's testimony. What we believe, from our point of view, about the nature or value of other religions, is a reliable testimony to our own faith, or to our own understanding of religious faith; but if our opinion about another religion differs from the opinion and evaluation of the believers, then we are no longer talking about their religion. We have turned aside from historical reality, and are concerned only with ourselves.[32]

This raises two points: To what extent can a phenomenologist testify on behalf of the believer? And to what extent can he testify for himself? On the first point Kristensen concedes that the phenomenologist, dealing as he does with historical data, is under an inherent limitation. "Every religion ought to be understood from its own standpoint, for that is how it is understood by its own adherents. The result of comparative research, and of every kind of historical research, is likewise less than ideal; only approximate knowledge is possible."[33] The answer is clear. The phenomenologist can only achieve an approximation, or a representation, not reality.

[30] J. E. Barnhart, *The Study of Religion and its Meaning* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1977), p. vii.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[32] Cited in Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
[33] W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 6. He goes on to say (*ibid.*, pp. 6–7): "Let us be completely aware of the limited validity of historical research. This limitation is imposed by the subject itself; namely the absolute character of all faith. Every believer looks upon his own religion as a unique, autonomous and absolute reality. It is of absolute value and thus incomparable. This is true not only for

> This imaginative reexperiencing of a situation strange to us is a form of representation, and not reality itself, for that always asserts itself with sovereign authority. We can even assume such an outside position in respect to our spiritual inheritance: we can form a more or less clear picture of our own national character, and we often do so. But then we always feel the shortcomings of our own formulation; the representation is always something else than the reality. The "existential" nature of the religious datum is never disclosed by research. That cannot be defined. Here we see the limit to the validity of historical research. But recognizing a limit of validity is not to deny the value of this research.[34]

This enables us to state that, while on the one hand the phenomenologist cannot give us an interpretation which will be identical with the believer's experience, on the other hand he can provide ns with a fairly good approximation. Thus phenomenologists should not claim that their understanding can be substituted for the believer's self-understanding, and believers need not claim that the phenomenologist has no access to their interiority just because he or she is not one of them.[35]

Now on to the other question: To what extent can the believer speak for himself? Michael Pye notes W. B. Kristensen's remarks that "[f]or the historian only one evaluation is possible, 'the believers are completely right'"[36] but goes on to comment:

the Christian, but just as surely for the adherent of a non-christian religion. And it is true not only for every religion conceived as a whole, but also for every part and every particular of religious belief. Not only 'Christianity' or any other particular religion is unique, autonomous and incomparable; so too is every belief and each sacred rite. The belief that Hades is the giver of all life and the sacred act by means of which that belief is actualized in the ritual of the mystery religion are absolute truths for the believers. But the historian cannot understand the absolute character of the religious data in the same way that the believer understands them."

34 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

35 G. van der Leeuw writes passionately that the phenomenology of religion has "in fact, one sole desire: *to testify* to what has been manifested to it. This it can do only by indirect methods, by a second experience of the event, by a thorough reconstruction; and from this road it must remove many obstacles. To see face to face is denied us, but much can be observed even in a mirror; and it is possible to speak about things seen" (*op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 677–678).

36 Michael Pye, *Comparative Religion* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), p. 17.

> Yet any set of religious data is enmeshed in a social and psychological context in which the average believer is probably not interested and which he might find very difficult to understand, concerning which indeed it is not inconceivable that he could be wrong. It is therefore necessary to understand not only as the believer understands, but also to approach the wider complexities of the data in a sociological and psychological manner.[37]

This may be so but the question is: Is it the task of the phenomenologist of religion, qua phenomenologist, to inquire into these issues? One may note that believers differ; one may take cognisance of the fact that believers regard each other to be wrong but is one not prevented by the method one has adopted from making any such value-judgement oneself? The most Kristensen seems to allow on this point is this: that the phenomenologist may become aware of pressures to which the believer is subject, such as "rationalisation" etc. He also seems to imply that the phenomenologist may arrive at a profounder understanding of what the believer is involved in than the believer.[38] But it follows from Kristensen's general position, it seems to us, that such understanding, arrived at by discerning a deeper structure, may not violate the self-understanding of the believer even if it is not a part of the disclosure, if it is to remain within the bounds of the phenomenology of religion.

VII

The next methodological item which needs to be taken up for consideration, is the value-free nature of the study of religion. This item

37 *Ibid.* But also see T. Patrick Burke, "Must the Description of a Religion be Acceptable to a Believer," *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), pp. 631–636.

38 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 460: "We may, however, not forget in this connection that in all religions not excepting Christianity, the believers often give rationalistic explanations of their own religious ideas and rites. This happens especially when they are questioned about them or themselves begin to reflect on them. The explanations which they give then do not correspond in the least to their real religious attitude, because that cannot be grasped by any interpretation. The believer can then say and also believe that he is precisely describing his attitude – but it is nevertheless true that the religious reality is always inexpressible. He is a rationalist in good faith, but we deceive ourselves if we think that his religion is rational."

is derived from the rejection of the theological and evolutionary approaches to the study of religion.[39]

Confusion on this point in the phenomenology of religion arises in two ways: The first is theological and the second hermeneutical. The phenomenology of religion, as a method, was seen as liberating the study of religion from any theological bias. Although such a separation is possible in theory it has not always been so in practice. The following autobiographical fragment of G. van der Leeuw, for instance, sheds some light on the complexity of the issue. It should be borne in mind here that G. van der Leeuw is sometimes considered the phenomenologist of religion *par excellence.*

> I have never felt the need to forget that I am a theologian, and naturally I have attempted to enable theology to profit from phenomenological method. Certainly not in order to make a science of religion out of theology, but on the contrary, the better to show forth theological method, which is in my opinion absolutely autonomous. Nevertheless, theology is concerned with history, since it is history which gives theology both its foundation and point of departure: revelation. Now phenomenology can assist theology to organise facts, to penetrate their sense, to find their essence, before theology is able to evaluate and use them for its doctrinal conclusions.[40]

The other source of confusion regarding the phenomenology of religion is what might be called the hermeneutical connection. Some scholars, such as Mircea Eliade, who are generally recognised as phenomenologists of religion, seem to be interested in the phenomenological study of religion, at least in part, for the insights it might yield about the religious life of humanity which may prove of wholesome relevance to humanity's present condition.[41] These scholars (a) see a positive value in the phenomenology of religion and (b) have a value-orientation of their own, which may be called humanitarian. Now it is true that no one should be faulted for placing a positive

39 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–15.

40 Quoted in Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

41 See Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 199–204; J. G. Arapura, *Religion as Anxiety and Tranquillity* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1972), pp. 51–57, etc.

value on the well-being of humanity, but this does seem to compromise somewhat the value-free stance of phenomenology.[42]

VIII

The next methodological item deals with the fact that the phenomenology of religion investigates forms or structure. To what source can this aspect of the phenomenology of religion be traced?

It seems possible to trace this aspect of the phenomenology of religion to pre-Husserlian Western philosophy. Kant had asserted that the thing in itself (*Ding an sich*) cannot be known.[43] Hegel (1770–1831), however, in his work significantly entitled 'The Phenomenology of the Spirit' (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*),[44] claimed that "the mind as it is in itself can be known through the ways in which it experiences reality. Or, to put it somewhat differently, essence (*Wesen*) can be approached through a study of appearances and manifestations (*Erscheinungen*)."[45]

Now this is precisely the claim phenomenology makes, although it may be too much to claim, as G. van der Leeuw did, that the phenomenology *of religion* was already in existence "although not known by that name."[46] The English title of his book reads: *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, although there is actually no essence apart from the manifestation.[47]

This much is clear. But confusion arises in the field of the phenomenology of religion, when the structures of religious experience are identified in such a way as to (a) violate the self-understanding of the believers or (b) are identified as meta-empirical, for phenomenology of religion is nothing if not empirical, persistently appealing to appearance.

42 The same task may be attempted by psychologists, for instance, more properly than by phenomenologists. See Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), Chapter III.

43 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 692.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

46 *Ibid.*

47 G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 675.

The first point leads one to distinguish the phenomenology of religion, which also deals with structures, from all forms of structuralism which go beyond the self-understanding of the believer. A good illustration of this is provided by the work of the French scholar, Louis Dumont, on the Indian caste-system, entitled *Homo Hierarchicus*.[48] Suzanne Hanchett remarks:

> In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont has chosen to view the caste system primarily in its ideological aspect. He justifies this approach as the faithful picture of the system as it appears to him; and he also echoes the phenomenological credo when he speaks of the relations between ideology and political or economic components of the caste phenomenon: 'It is only in relation to the totality thus reconstructed from a combination of the indigenous Hindu view and our own that the ideology takes on its true sociological significance.'[49]

Inasmuch as Dumont has added his own view to the indigenous Hindu view, he is not strictly doing phenomenology of religion. He would pass muster as a phenomenologist of religion *if* his own view was acceptable to the insiders. This is controversial.[50]

On the point of the structures, two points may be initially distinguished: (1) Is the believer aware of the structures?, and (2) are they acceptable to him when he becomes aware of them? It is clear that if the answer is "yes" to both, then the enterprise continues to be capable of being characterised as falling within the phenomenology of religion, though more so perhaps in the first case than the second.

48 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 2.

49 Suzanne Hanchett, "Reflections and Oppositions: On Structuralism," in Harry M. Buck and Glenn E. Yocum, eds., *Structural Approaches to South Indian Studies* (Chambersburg: Conocheague Associates, Inc., 1974), pp. 6–7, emphasis added. To develop these points further see Hans H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), Chapter Seven; Steven Collins, "Louis Dumont and the Study of Religions," *Religious Studies Review* 15:1 (Jan. 1989), pp. 14–20.

50 Mariasusai Dhavamony remarks (*op. cit.*, p. 163, emphasis added): "In case of doubt I can test my understanding, i.e., verify or falsify my hypothesis by further acts of understanding. If I think I have misunderstood the fact, *I can consult other observers*; I can also ask for explanations and motivations for such fact from the performers themselves."

But now we have to negotiate more difficult terrain: What is the status of the strnctures in history? That phenomenology is avowedly ahistorical should be borne in mind as one goes through what comes next:

> Phenomenology, in the Eliadian style, is like this. It is not historically falsifiable. Since it is an ahistorical approach, however legitimate that might be in itself, when it enters into historical deliberation it becomes a barrier to the attainment of authentic religio-historical understanding. Whether or not it is legitimate to see fertility implications in pearl wearing when such thoughts are not in the mind of the wearer is one question. But how an observation of the way in which a given moment fits into transhistorical religious structures, could possibly further historical knowledge is yet another question. Such considerations can only hinder the religio-historical question and its answer.[51]

A few points emerge clearly. To "see fertility implications in pearl wearing when such thoughts are not in the mind of the wearer" makes it a donbtful case from the point of view of phenomenology of religion as nnderstood here, unless the understanding is not rejected by the pearl-wearer when put to him or her. However, the question of phenomenology being falsifiable or not mnst be explored further. On the general question of verifiability and falsifiability John Hick suggests some useful points:[52] "1. The verification of a factnal assertion is not the same as a logical demonstration of it. The central core of the idea of verification is the removal of grounds for rational doubt";[53] 2. "[s]ometimes it is necessary to put oneself in a certain position or perform some particular function as a prerequisite for verification;"[54] 3. "... although verifiable normally means 'publicly verifiable' (i.e. capable in principle of being verified by anyone), it does not follow that a given verifiable proposition has in fact been or will in fact ever be verified by anyone;"[55] and 4. "[i]t is possible

51 Robert D. Baird, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

52 John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (third edition) (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1983), Chapter Seven.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*

for a proposition to be in principle verifiable but not in principle falsifiable."[56]

It follows from (4) that if one does not have access to the insider of a tradition, then a "structure" phenomenologically identified may be verifiable (if we could have access to it) but is otherwise not falsifiable. It also follows from (2) that the critic of the phenomenologist should be willing to, pro tempore, practise phenomenology. It also follows from (1) that if a "structure" is not logically demonstrated, it could still be considered verified, if grounds for rational doubts were removed.

These comments indicate that there can be no open-and-shut case on the question of phenomenological structures. The jury is still out. But one interesting point emerges: what if different phenomenologists come up with different structures based on the same data, a possibility to which Williard G. Oxtoby has drawn pointed attention?[57] The *empirical* check is provided by the believers. Though on the surface, the generation of multiple structures out of the same database would seem to falsify them all, snch need not necessarily be the case. At least one, or even more than one, structure may be acceptable to the believers though how exactly this acceptability is to be determined is admittedly a tricky point. But in principle then, the structures generated by the phenomenology of religion are open to a certain kind of *empirical verification* through the verdict of believers.

This naturally raises the question: what kind of believers might verify what kinds of statements? The question is a vexed one and awaits full clarification bnt the following remarks by Philip Ashby go a long way towards shedding some initial light on the question.

> When the historian of religion sets about the challenging task of understanding Hinduism – to pursue further the example we have chosen – he must endeavor to participate *in* Hinduism. And to "participate in" demands that one become as fully as possible at one with those who are Hindu by birth, environmental conditioning, training, and mature adult commitment.
>
> If we examine, first, the fundamenral stance of the contemporary Hindu intellectual who is religiously committed as well as intellectually intrigued by the tradition that surrounds him, we note very quickly that for him Hinduism is conceived and appropriated personally as a continuous, living, non-static organism. To be sure, he may, and often does, base his thought on forms highly dependent upon a particular document or intellectual tradition of the pasr. But close examination will usually reveal that his particular citation of authority, or its mode of expression, arises not out of exclusive allegiance to the source but, rather, from an awareness that this is for the moment the most appropriate documentation or form of articulation.[58]

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

He goes on to say:

> It is only as the historian of religion participates by re-enactment within himself of the long continuous unfolding of Hinduism, and thereby comprehends something of the religious pilgrimage of the Indian people, that he can begin to understand the voice of Hindu religiosity. Perhaps the re-enactment will need to begin with Mohenjo-daro-Harappa; most certainly it will become active and deeply involved by the time of the gveda; and from then on there is little, if anything, in the total Indian scene that can be allowed to escape attention. With the Hindu intellectual he must ponder the *upaniadic* ferment and participate in the transformations brought about by the ājīvikas, the Jains, and the Buddhists. He must call to mind the deep involvement of a people, their culture and their society, with a religious quest that has marked and molded them from the dawn of history. This may be historic romanticism, but it is also historic fact. The historian of religion who identifies Hinduism with any one of the periods or aspects of Hindu history and thought, to the exclusion of others, misunderstands because he limits the scope of his participation.[59]

It is clear then that certain kinds of statements about a tradition are to be verified through the intellectuals of that tradition. This is a useful first approximation and yields the general principle, as obvious as it is helpful, that each statement may be related to a specific domain of the tradition for its proper verification. Thus it is the women of a tradition who could, for instance, verify statements about them. Of course it is easier to lay down the principle in theory than apply it in practice!

[58] Philip H. Ashby, "The History of Religions and the Study of Hinduism," in Joseph M. Kitagawa, ed., *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 154.

[59] *Ibid.*

A criticism similar to the one just considered has been made by Haralds Biezais.[60] He distinguishes among three kinds of types: (1) the empirically based types on the "basis of characteristics which can be established empirically;" (2) types based on a "normative principle of systematization" which operate "as a category of scientific theory;" and (3) "by means of phenomenology, types can establish direct relationships between the object to be understood and the person understanding it, between the spheres of the empirical and the transcendental, and thus they can reveal contextual meaning. In this case, the typological method becomes a special epistemological method of speculative comparative religion."[61]

Biezais concludes that while the first two kinds of types "allow the typological method to be employed within the limits of the empirical history of religions," in the "case of the third alternative, the typological and phenomenological methods become identical (van der Leeuw), and must be regarded as a specific path of recognition within history of religions which has passed beyond the boundaries of empirical research."[62] It is our view that this need not necessarily be so in principle. It can be tested out on the believers, at least in the case of living religions.

IX

The final methodological item identified as the phenomenology of religion is interpretation. What constitutes the explanatory background for the presence of this element in the method?

This element in the method seems to tie into what may be called the hermeneutical connection. This connection can be traced right within the Judaeo-Christian tradition[63] but comes to the fore in the work of J. Wach, Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mircea Eliade.[64]

60 Haralds Biezais, "Typology of Religion and the Phenomenological Method," in Lauri Honko, ed., *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), pp. 143–161.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 160.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161.

63 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

The expression "hermeneutical connection" has been used in the above paragraph to refer to the overlapping concerns which are shared by the phenomenology of religion and hermeneutics, when the latter word is used in its broadest acceptation. People like Heidegger, for instance, interpret the human situation. Religions do the same. Hence phenomenology of religion also deals with issues of being, life, death and the meaning of being, life and death. Moreover, if one works with the assumption that the nature of religion is irreducible, then its insights on these issues cannot be dismissed as derivative. Finally, if religion is not just something but something which claims to possess salvific power, then the study of such autonomous religion cannot entirely be divorced from a humanism of some kind or another. The work of Ricoeur becomes particularly helpful here because he combines the concerns mentioned above with an abiding interest in Christianity. Both phenomenology of religion and hermenentics are thus concerned with a multilayered journey through many levels of meaning, sufficiently similar in structure to warrant such a locution as the 'hermeneutical connection.'

The confusion on this point arises from the different goals of the phenomenology of religion and hermeneutics. For the phenomenology of religion, understanding is an end in itself. But for hermeneutics such understanding should make a contribution to life. Michael Pye notes how the "phenomenological method is espoused by van der Leeuw, Bleeker, Eliade, etc."[65] "to contribute to the elucidation of the meaning of 'essence' of the phenomenon of 'religion'"[66] but the "writers themselves go beyond this."[67] He points out that the "general assumption seems to be that somehow behind the variety of theologies and symbols, rituals and observances, behind the 'manifestations,' there waits a deeper meaning or structure, a constantly available 'essence.' This 'essence,' the ardent phenomenologist might claim, is instinctively known by the archaically religious person, whereas for the disenchanted, modern man it needs to be conjured up again by some creative interpreter."[68]

65 Michael Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*

If we follow his argument, then the above assumption would seem to obfuscate the meaning of the phenomenology of religion in two ways. First, in "some cases this approach seems even to have become a substitute for theology."[69] In other words, phenomenology of religion falls into the very pit it tried to climb out of in the first place. Second, it could lead not only to theology but to theology of a particular type. Pye thinks it a mistake to "presume that there is an essential inner unity of meanings or meaning, and to harness the comparative study of the data to the elucidation of that presumed meaning for human beings in general. It may be added that belief in the deeper unity of all religions is itself a well-known theological or dogmatic position characteristic, for example, of the Hindu tradition. This alone should make us beware of turning it into a methodological assumption in the study of religion, which should be free of theological presuppositions of any sort."[70]

There can be little doubt that the business of applying the results arrived at through the phenomenology of religion is not the task of phenomenology of religion itself but of hermeneutics, and the distinction should be maintained. The claim that phenomenology of religion is a value-free intellectual enterprise acquires significance here. Despite similarities in structures of meaning, phenomenology of religion and hermeneutics may be differentiated on the basis of their "intentionality." Phenomenology of religion sets out to understand the religious life of others and that is its intended goal. That its work may, in the end, come to possess positive implications for humanity is a consequence, it is not its goal. Put graphically, it is not the avowed intention of the phenomenology of religion to make us feel at home in the world, or the universe (even if it produces this result), while it could be argued that it is the goal of hermeneutics to produce such an outcome. There is nothing to prevent the same scholar, however, from playing the two roles but he, or she, must dress differently for each.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] *Ibid.*

X

Our troubles are, however, not yet over. There are at least four other areas which need to be clarified further in relation to the phenomenology of religion, if the term is to have a clear referent. Conceptual clarifications relating to the term itself and to what is meant by "empirical" seem called for. The terms "subjectivity" and the "scientific" method also need to be clarified.

There are some terms which have been used virtually as equivalents of the phenomenology of religion but probably should not be so used.[71] Some scholars, like C. J. Bleeker in *Anthropologie religieuse*,[72] for example, use the term anthropology of religion "to denote the comparative or phenomenological study of beliefs and practices that are related to the nature and destiny of man."[73] However, although the phenomenology of religion "may touch upon the field of anthropology proper, it is not considered by anthropologists as a legitimate branch of their discipline, for it deals with the conceptual analysis of religious traditions."[74]

A far greater number of scholars use the term phenomeuology of religion in association with comparative religion. S. G. F. Brandon notes:

> Phenomenology of Religion ('Religionsphänomenologie'). This designation is often used by Continental scholars for the study customarily called 'Comparative Religion' ('vergleichende Religiouswissenschaft'). P.R. is distinguished from Theology (which assumes existence of God) and History of Religion ('Religionsgeschichte'), in being concerned not with validity or origin of religious belief and practice, but with their existential significance as evidence of man's thought and action. Its aim has been defined as 'studying the action of man in relation to God, not the action of God'. It is basically a humanistic, not a theological, discipline; it is inevitably concerned with the historical data of religion, but it does not seek to study religion in its historical development. Whether P.R. is a better designation than 'Comparative Religion', or can rightly be used as a synonym, is debatable. Although the latter is not

[71] See Mariasusai Dhavamony, *op. cit.*, p. 8, note 7.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 4, note 3.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid.*

semantically accurate (it really means the 'comparative study of religion'), it is both an established and convenient expression. In practice Comparative Religion is concerned with the historical as well as the comparison of religious phenomena; for the historical and comparative aspects cannot properly be studied in strict separation from each other. Studies in P.R. are rarely confined to describing religious phenomena.[75]

It is clear then that while what is called *comparative* religion is "concerned with the *history* as well as the comparison of religious phenomena," phenomenology is only concerned with comparison, and that too without bias toward a theological or evolutionary evaluation underlying the comparison.

This might be the right place to clarify the question of the relationship of the phenomenology of religion to history. Two views are to be met with on this point. On the one hand we meet with the unequivocal assertion that "phenomenology knows nothing of any historical 'development' of religion, still less of an 'origin' of religion. Its perpetual task is to free itself from every non-phenomenological standpoint and to retain its own liberty, while it conserves the inestimable value of this position always anew."[76] This position has been criticised. Mariasusai Dhavamony writes:

> Some phenomenologists of religion have flatly stated that their phenomenology of religion has nothing to do with the historical origin and development of religious facts. This position also cannot be admitted, for the essence of a religious fact is historically conditioned and one cannot overlook history in the manifestation of the religious fact, and the historical development of a fact does contribute to getting at new meanings or even to correct the older ones in the light of changing circumstances and contexts, and the essence itself of the fact, thought invariable in some aspects becomes variable in others, for this kind of essence, as we have already said, is empirical and every empirical can [*sic*] be made more precise and more adequate, as one gets new material in one's investigation.[77]

Dhavomony cites Raffaele Pettazzoni, so it would seem, in support of his assertion thus:

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75 S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 494–495.
76 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 688.
77 Mariasusai Dhavamony, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

> Phenomenology and history complement each other. Phenomenology cannot do without ethnology, philology and other historical disciplines. Phenomenology on the other hand gives the historical disciplines that sense of the religious which they are not able to capture. So conceived, religious phenomenology is the religious understanding (*Verständnis*) of history; it is history in its religious dimension. Religious phenomenology and history are not two sciences but are two complementary aspects of the integral science of religion [which] as such has a well-defined character given to it by its unique and proper subject matter.[78]

But Pettazzoni himself states elsewhere that the phenomenology of religion ignores history.[79] S. G. F. Brandon, in the entry under the phenomenology of religion in *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion*, which he edited, notes, as already indicated, that the phenomenology of religion is not concerned with "validity or origin of religious belief and practice" and again notes that "it does not seek to study religion in its historical development."[80]

One possible position, which could be taken here, would be to favour the stand that phenomenology of religion is ahistorical, and to maintain that it deals not with essence "invariable in some respects" but "variable in others," but rather with the invariable aspect. Perhaps one could have an historical phenomenology which includes such a mixed exercise but it would then not be the phenomenology of religion as such.[81] However, much depends now on how

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78 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11. Cited with a correction.
79 Lauri Honko, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 159, note 36.
80 S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 495.
81 The same problem is posed by the following comment of Mariasusai Dhavamony (*op. cit.*, p. 13, emphasis added): "Two basic functions of an ideal-type construct are as follows: a) it provides a limiting case with which concrete phenomena may be contrasted, and an unambiguous concept by which classification and comparison is facilitated; b) as such it constitutes a framework for the development of type generalizations which in turn serve the ultimate purpose of ideal-type analysis: *the causal explanation of historical events*. Ideal-types and type generalizations must be 'objectively possible' in the sense that concrete phenomena approximate more or less to the pure type and be subjectively meaningful in the sense that the type of action is understandable in terms of individual motivation."

It surfaces again in the following passage (*op. cit.*, p. 14, emphasis added): "Phenomenology of religion does not confine itself to the verification and the analytical explanation of single data such as are studied separately by the

we define these terms and what we choose to include within or exclude from the purview of phenomenology of religion. Perhaps the appreciation of a distinction between 'religion' and 'religious facts' would help clarify and even reduce the area of disagreement.

Another point regarding the history and phenomenology of religion needs to be investigated. It will help to clarify the point if we distinguished, at the outset, between traditional history and critical history. Traditional history is what the believer thinks happened; critical history is what the historian tells us happened. When the two coincide there is no problem but when they diverge the phenomenology of religion has two sets of data to deal with, those of the traditional history and those of critical history. It is possible to use *either* set of data in a phenomenology of religion.

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various specialized disciplines. It seeks to coordinate religious data with one another, to establish relations and to group the facts according to those relations. If it is a matter of formal relations, it classifies religious data under types; *if the relations are chronological, it makes them into series.* In the former case the science of religion is merely descriptive; in the latter when the relationships in question are not merely chronological, when, in other words, the succession of events in time corresponds to an internal development, the science of religion becomes a historical science, the history of religions."

A third passage again poses the same problem (*ibid.*, p. 15, emphasis added): "Certainly against a history of religions which is exclusively concerned with specialized philological research and solely interested in the 'cultural' manifestations of religion and too little in the essential values of religious life and experience, phenomenology represents a reaction as legitimate as it is laudable. *In our view it is both, history and phenomenology.* Religious phenomena do not cease to be realities historically conditioned merely because they are grouped under this or that structure. Phenomenological understanding (verstehen) runs the risk of ascribing a like meaning to phenomena whose likeness is nothing but the illusory reflection from a convergence of developments different in their essence; or, on the contrary, of not grasping the similar meaning of certain phenomena whose real likeness in kind is hidden under an apparent and purely external dissimilarity. Phenomenology knows that it depends upon history and that its own conclusions always remain susceptible of revision in view of the progress of historical research." The position taken by Mariasusai Dhavamony is supported by Ugo Bianchi (Lauri Honko, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 317). The issue is an important one on which opinion seems to be divided (see *ibid.*, pp. 146, 152, etc.). Mircea Eliade thinks that the "difficulty is real" but that "one can surmount it" (Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959], p. 93).

This point has not been sufficiently appreciated. According to the traditional account the 'Red Sea' parted at the command of Moses[82] and one could include this account in a phenomenology of miracles. According to the critical account,

> the Priestly Writer provided the basic narrative pattern of divine command and divine execution, and he has enriched his narrative by drawing upon the old Epic (JE) tradition. After separating the materials which display Priestly language and interests, the remaining material portrays a crossing that was facilitated by wind and tide.
>
> And Yahweh drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land ... And in the morning watch Yahweh in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians and threw the host of the Egyptians into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily; and the Egyptians said "Let us flee from before Israel; for Yahweh fights for them against the Egyptians."
>
> – EXODUS 14: 21h, 24–25
>
> Such an occurrence, as reported by the old Epic tradition, is not impossible in the marshy area of Lake Mensalah; in fact, it has been witnessed at other times. The miracle was that it happened at a particular time and with a particular meaning.[83]

What we have here is an example of the phenomenology of how the supernatural interpretation of natural events is structured!

One basic point still awaits clarification. Is the phenomenology of religion merely a mode of collecting data or is it also a methodology for examining such data? The point needs to be elaborated. The phenomenological principle that "the believer is always right" could be employed *merely* at the stage of collecting data. Thus an anthropologist could confine oneself, during one's field experience, to recording only what the participants did, said, and felt or said they felt. These data would be phenomenological in the sense that the anthropologist has not gathered them in terms of what he or she thought was happening, but in terms of what the believers told him or her was happening, or in terms not of what he or she experienced but the believer's experience. However, once such data had been

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[82] Exodus 14:21–23.

[83] Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1975), pp. 70–71.

collected, the anthropologist – or the sociologist, psychologist, or historian for that matter – could then use these data to develop hypotheses which need not take the believers into further account at all. On the other hand, one could visualise a study in which further theorising scrupulously respected the views of the believers. Now the question may be asked: Is the phenomenology of religion a mode of data collection or a method of study? It is, in reality, both, as it is practised. It is easy to see, though, how the data could be collected phenomenologically but then utilised non-phenomenologically.

One may now examine two charges that are frequently levelled against phenomenology: that it is not sufficiently empirical and that it is overly subjective.

A. Hultkrantz observes, regarding van der Leeuw's work referred to several times in this disquisition, that

> ... it is too speculative, in some places even incomprehensible, to be of much use to the seriously working empirical religious researcher ... van der Leeuw's phenomenology comprises – maybe – an 'Einklammerung', a parenthesis, in the development of the phenomenology of religion.[84]

Haralds Biezais, as noted earlier, observes that the methodology of the phenomenology of religion must "be regarded as a specific path of recognition within the history of religion which has passed beyond the boundaries of empirical research."[85]

One response by those who wish to defend the phenomenology of religion against this charge has been to criticise the excessive obsession with the empirical. Thus Eric J. Sharpe responds by saying: "The crux lies perhaps in this word 'empirical'. To be thoroughly empirical was, in a manner of speaking the foremost symptom of what van der Leeuw held to be the typical twentieth-century sickness. He did not, as we have seen, look down upon empirical research. Far from it. But to be narrowly and exclusively empirical was to deny one's own wholeness, and hence to fail at the scholar's most vital and most sensitive point, the point of genuine understanding."[86]

[84] Lauri Honko, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

It seems, however, that the case for the phenomenology of religion could also be stated in empirical terms. That the phenomenology of religion seeks the essence of the phenomenon is not sufficient ground for condemning it. Mariasusai Dhavamony observes:

> Some scholars who belong to the historical school strongly reacted against phenomenology's claim that the essence of religious facts can be grasped. For them a religious phenomenon is exclusively a historical fact without transhistorical meaning or value; the quest for essences would involve the repetition of Platonic error. However this is an unjust accusation, for phenomenology of religion never pretended to be a science of the ultimate essence of religion. There are various kinds of essence, empirical, philosophical and theological, when we speak of the essence of religion; and all that phenomenology of religion intends to understand is the essence of the religious phenomenon, taken in the empirical sense of the invariable structure of a phenomenon that underlies every religious fact.[87]

Now we turn to the charge of excessive subjectivity. Here again Eric J. Sharpe offers a preliminary response. He writes that whereas historians of religion insist that no phenomenologist can abandon the historical method (and actually some phenomenologists insist on the same as well),

> [n]evertheless in his very selection of types and patterns for his phenomenology he has moved some steps beyond plain and unadorned historical exposition; there is a higher degree of subjectivity in this procedure than he would perhaps want to allow. But it is no part of our present purpose to decry that element in phenomenology; indeed, it is hard to see how phenomenology could otherwise exist at all, if there is to be even the slightest trace of the 'eidetic vision' invoked in its conception and execution. We would merely remark that it is at this point that the phenomenologist who wants at the same time to claim objective status for his work may well find himself in something of a dilemma.[88]

It may again be suggested that phenomenology of religion need not go on the defensive so soon. One could maintain, for instance, that, in its own way, the phenomenology of religion is indeed objective:

[87] Mariasusai Dhavamony, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
[88] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

> Religious facts are subjective in the sense of being the religious man's state of mind, way of looking at things, or interpretation. At the same time these facts and their connections are objective in the sense that they are not the making of the thinking mind but that independent observers could verify them. By a convergence of different acts of understanding we may find out that a tribe holds ceremonies of expiation because it fears the anger of the gods; this conclusion is related to a body of independent evidence. There is the need to exclude the kind of subjectivity which would vitiate a piece of scientific research. Objectivity consists in letting the facts speak for themselves.[89]

In view of the approach adopted in this chapter one may wish to replace the expression "independent observers could verify it" with "believers could verify it" – but the point holds.

The phenomenology of religion is subjective in two senses. It is subjective in the sense that what it deals with takes place in, and involves, a human subject. It is also subjective in the sense that the phenomenologist wants to grasp the meaning of the phenomenon for himself. But it is precisely its dual subjective nature which makes it objective in a particular sense – for the phenomenologist can validate his or her conclusions with the believers.[90]

XI

The issues of subjectivity and objectivity often surface in the phenomenology of religion in the context of the discussion of the extent to which its procedures could be considered scientific in nature. It may therefore be appropriate to close this chapter with an examination of this point.

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89 Mariasusai Dhavamony, *op. cit.*, p. 17, emphasis added. Also see *ibid.*, p. 16: "Religion primarily is a phenomenon that takes place in a human subject and is expressed in signs and symbols. We can repeat the act of understanding of the religious phenomenon and compare it with the acts of understanding of other observers and conclude that X is an act of worship, that Y is an act of sacrifice, and that Z is an act of prayer. Then these facts assume the status of objectivity. In other words religious phenomena are objectively ascertainable but subjectively rooted facts."

90 See Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.

In this context it might be helpful to distinguish between the world of scholarship, science in general, and the 'scientific method' in particular. It is obvious that scholarship is the broadest of these three categories, and consists of a well-documented and systematic examination of any topic, independently of the nature of the topic. Thus scholarship takes all subjects in its maw. Science, by contrast, is one of the topics in dealing with which scholarship might be exhibited, and therefore constitutes a subset of scholarship.

Science, by itself, could then be said to consist of the conclusions arrived at by the application of the scientific method. Thus what is typically referred to as a science, such as physics or astronomy, is constituted of the results of the application of the scientific method in these fields. Science is thus the product, and the scientific method the process, through which this product is obtained.

But what constitutes the scientific method? The concept of the scientific method has itself changed with the development of science, although it can be argued that these changes possess sufficient coherence in their diversity to enable one to speak of the scientific method in general.

The word science originally meant "any systematic body of knowledge ranging from mathematics to theology"[91] and the expression scientific method or the method of science then meant "the method for obtaining, or perhaps merely for presenting and teaching knowledge in general."[92] In early Greek thought the manner of acquisition of such knowledge took a primarily deductive turn in Plato and a more inductive (and prospectively more 'scientific' turn) in Aristotle. Medieval philosophers such as Roger Bacon, John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham took their cue from Aristotle and the "seventeenth century, a time of fundamental change in physics and astronomy, saw continuing attention to method within the inductive-deductive framework established by Aristotle."[93] The nineteenth century saw more conscious deliberation on the method of science

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91 Gary Hatfield, "Scientific Method," in Edward Craig, General Editor, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), Vol. 8, p. 576.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 577.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 578.

under such terms as the 'philosophy of science' and 'logic of science.' Two important figures in this respect are William Whewell and John Stuart Mill. Whewell is significant for dividing the "methods of science into methods of ohservation, of obtaining clear ideas and of induction,"[94] where method of observation included "quantitative observation (as in chemistry or astronomy) and the perception of similarities (as in natural history)," and observation included "both the collection and classification of facts."[95] John Stuart Mill is important for proposing that "psychology and the social sciences adopt the explanatory procedures of natural sciences, a proposal frequently criticised since his time notably by the neo-Kantian Wilhelm Dilthey."[96] This controversy will also surface in this dissertation later but the point to be held firmly in sight at this moment is that the "word science now means primarily natural science, examples of which are physics, astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology and psychology, and it applies secondarily to social sciences such as economics and sociology."[97] Two senses of the word scientific method can so far be identified – (1) "any systematic body of knowledge" and (2) the method of the natural sciences. It is worth noting here that when we now proceed to talk of the scientific method we have the method of the natural sciences in mind. Before we proceed to examine how and to what extent the phenomenology of religion could be considered 'scientific,' we may pause here to mention two developments in the discussion of the scientific method which need not detain us but will assume significance subsequently. One is Karl Popper's conclusion that "the defining feature of the empirical methods of science is that statements are always subjected to falsification by new data" and the other is the need stressed by Thomas S. Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend "to distinguish the idealized accounts of the scientific method given by some scientists and philosophers from the actual methodological practices of scientists."[98] The significance of this point arises from the fact that "[i]n studying the latter, historical and

[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 576.
[98] *Ibid.*, p. 579.

sociological investigation supplements the participatory acquaintance with scientific research possessed by the scientists themselves and by some philosophers."[99] Both these factors will assume relevance in assessing the current situation in the phenomenology of religion.

We revert now to a consideration of the scientific method in the context of phenomenology of religion.

So what constitutes the scientific method? Like the other two categories of "scholarship" and "science" applied above, the category of "scientific method" is also at least a debated, if not a contested, category. However, pared to its essentials, the scientific method may reasonably be said to consist of observation and replication, and induction. The scientific method essentially consists of experimentation, and where experimentation may not be possible (as in the case of astronomical phenomena) it takes recourse to observation. Both however involve *comparison*, as of one experiment with another in the case of experimentation, and of one observation with another in the case of observation. This is how the expression *comparative* religion, it may be felt, imbues the study of religion with a scientific potency.

The systematic use of comparison leads to induction. The urge to arrive at induction through 'comparison' (as explained above) thus constitutes a basic thrust of the scientific method. The vocabulary of science usually employs words like experimentation, observation and induction. The terrain of the study of religion, at first glance, would not seem very congenial for their deployment, thereby indicating that problems might arise if one chose to refer to the study of religion as a science.

If, however, one chose to work with the concepts implied in the use of such words as experimentation, observation and discussion to characterise the scientific method, namely, those of *comparison* and *systematic analysis*, then the complexion of the case begins to change, because the study of religion employs these in a major way. Even the more forbidding vocabulary of *observation* and *replication* can be reinterpreted to apply to the study of religion. The data in the study

[99] *Ibid.*

of religion does not *always* consist of observation in the usual sense. Much of its data, however, comes from history which can be viewed as a record of what is *observed* to have occurred in the past. Some of its current data is also based on actual observation of the believers, and sometimes on what is observed by the believers. One does not want to push the point to the stage where it deteriorates into word-play, but one hopes the point is made that the study of religion does involve observation in extended meanings of the word. It runs into trouble not with the category of observation as such but rather with the need for "repeated observations," a cornerstone of the scientific method. Even this, however, does have a substitute in the study of religion, in the form of *comparable* data provided by different religious traditions. Thus although observations cannot be repeated at will in the study of religion the way this might be possible in a laboratory, the study of religion is not at a total loss here.

If one now relates the concepts of *comparison* and *systematic analysis*, then the study of religion can lay a stronger claim to being considered scientific, so far as the phenomenological method is involved. The following explanation of the role of comparison in the study of religion is helpful here, as it is specially applicable to the phenomenological method. Michael Pye writes:

> What then does comparison involve? Simply stated, it involves noting similarities and recurrent associations between relevant data and building these up into theoretical patterns. These theoretical patterns in turn remind us to look for the same characteristics and associations in further cases in which they may lie as yet unnoticed. If the emerging theoretical pattern with respect to some particular aspect of religion proves to be useful it will be retained and developed or modified as necessary, and if not it will be abandoned in favour of another. The comparative study of religion is therefore both more and less than the history of particular religions. On the one hand it is an attempt to begin with data from the history of religions and to go beyond the constraints of the immediate context in order to construct a more generally useful frame of understanding. But on the other hand it is the servant of history and, as a theoretical construct, it always leads back to the attempt to understand particular further cases of religion.[100]

[100] Michael Pye, *Comparative Religion: An Introduction through Source Materials* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), pp. 21–22.

Similarly, the centrality of systematic analysis in the context of the phenomenological method becomes clear from the following account.

> The phenomenology of Chantepie, we said, is systematic in the sense that it is a classification or a grouping together of the most important sides and aspects of the principal forms of religious acting and thinking. Similarly, Kristensen's phenomenology is systematic in the sense that it extracts the principal religious phenomena from their historical context and studies them in groups such that the more evident of meaning can shed light upon the more obscure. For van der Leeuw, the phenomenology of religion is systematic in the same way that any reasoned and deliberate effort towards understanding is systematic. Classification, for van der Leeuw, is a natural step in the process in which the unfamiliar and alien comes gradually to be understood.[101]

Another basis for the association of the phenomenological method with science could be provided by its "empirical orientation." This raises the question: Is the phenomenology of religion empirical and if so, in what sense?

The association of the phenomenological method with typology provides scope for extending the argument further. H. Biezais, in analysing the relationship between typology and phenomenology, identifies three different concepts of types described earlier in this chapter.[102]

Although in terms of his threefold division of types the phenomenology of religion has been identified with the third, this need not be the case. The other types regularly fall within the purview of phenomenology of religion and some scholars even restrict their work to the first two types, or even the first.[103] The formulation of the first two types decidedly possesses an empirical orientation,[104]

[101] George Alfred James, *Interpreting Religion* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 206.

[102] See endnote 58; also see Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983), Vol. I, p. 98.

[103] As for instance in the work of P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, see George Alfred James, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[104] Ursula King, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

and the second is specifically referred to as a 'category of scientific theory.'

This association of the phenomenological method with empirical studies raises another question: What does it have in common, and wherein does it differ, from empirical fact-finding disciplines in the study of religion?[105] In this case the similarity between the two consists of faithfulness to what is observed in terms of the insider's perspective, as enshrined in the observer-participation method of data-gathering. The differences lie in two directions: (1) the goal underlying the collection of data and (2) the procedures carried out on the data. Sociology of religion, for instance, as an empirical science will use the same method of gathering data as the phenomenological, but with its own purposes in view such as to assess the extent of secularization in a society,[106] etc. The goal of phenomenology will be to deepen its understanding of religious life per se. Similarly, the procedures carried out on the data through the phenomenological approach would look for anything from structures of experience to timeless essences, whereas other methods would pursue different agendas.

105 See Frank Whaling, ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 10–11.
106 *Ibid.*, pp. 173–174.

CHAPTER IV

The Phenomenology of Religion and the Phenomenological Movement

The nature of the relationship between the concept of phenomenology, as used in philosophy,[1] and that of phenomenology as it is employed in the study of religion,[2] is a matter of considerable debate on which diverse opinions have been expressed. These opinions are not merely diverse but extreme as well and vary from one end of the spectrum, which regards the connection as little more than a fiction,[3] to the other, which locates the phenomenology of religion securely within the phenomenological movement.[4] What, then, is the nature of the relationship between the two?

I

One might begin by examining the extreme position that there is no relationship between the two, except in name. This view, vigorously advocated by Hans H. Penner, is best illustrated by the contrast he sees between Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the representative par excellence of the phenomenological method in philosophy, and his counterpart, Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950), in the pheuom-

1 Richard Schmitt, "Phenomenology," in Paul Edwards, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company and Free Press, 1967), Vol. 6, pp. 135–151.
2 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor-in-chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, pp. 272–285.
3 Hans H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution. A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 42.
4 Willard G. Oxtoby, "The Idea of the Holy," in Mircea Eliade, editor-in-chief, *op.cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 436.

enology of religion. The word "epoché," (a notion which conventional wisdom regards as entering phenomenological religious discourse from philosophical phenomenology) according to Penner is, although found in van der Leeuw,[5] "not in the original German edition and is obviously an afterthought." He goes on to say, "[t]here are no notes on the use of *epoche* in Chapter 109, 'The Phenomenology of Religion.' At one place van der Leeuw defines *epoché* as 'restraint' (Zurückhaltung). See *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr Verlag, 1933) 640. The English edition of the book translates *epoché* as 'intellectual suspense.' Thus, at one point, we get the nonsense sentence 'exercises the intellectual suspense of the *epoche*' (van der Leeuw 687). The only explicit reference to Husserl is made on page 675 (Eng. ed.) where van der Leeuw asserts that 'Phenomenology is concerned only with 'phenomena' that is with 'appearance'; for it, there is nothing whatsoever 'behind' the phenomena.' This is clearly not Husserl's view of the subject."[6]

In other words, the differences are not merely verbal but substantial.[7] Moreover, Penner also correctly cites the reference to G. van der Leeuw's use of philosophical phenomenology by Herbert Spiegelberg as "an afterthought to the possibility of a phenomenology of religion."[8] The basic contention here is that phenomenology in philosophy and phenomenology in the study of religion should be treated as separate universes of discourse, and this turns on two facts: (1) if one treats the Husserlian enterprise as a transcendental philosophy, then it is plainly inconsistent with the phenomenology of religion; (2) if one takes it as an eidetic presentation of the mundane world then, again, it is inconsistent with the phenomenology of religion according to which, as per van der Leeuw, the "entire essence is given in its appearance."[9] These were the two directions in

5 G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (with Appendices to the Torchbook edition incorporating the additions of the second German edition by Hans H. Penner) (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1963), Vol. II, p. 646, note 1.

6 Hans H. Penner, *op. cit.*, p. 61 note 6.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

8 Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984), p. 10.

9 G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 671.

which Husserl's thonght developed and neither seem to serve as a point of contact with van der Leeuw. Penner extends this critique to a whole chapter and is quite explicit that "the task in this chapter is to demonstrate that the influence of Husserl on what has become known as 'phenomenology of religion' is at best a folk tale and that the history and phenomenology of religion as we know it today can reasonably be described as Christian theology carried out by other means."[10] There is some autobiographical evidence to lend support to his last point, at least where van der Leeuw is concerned.[11]

II

The position of C. Jouco Bleeker (1898–1983) on this point seems to be somewhat less extreme. Unlike Penner, Bleeker identifies van der Leeuw as one "deeply influenced" by "philosophical phenomenology"[12] and cites chapter and verse to establish his point.[13] However, Bleeker also addresses the charge that the phenomenologists of religion "use the principles of the epochè and of the eidetic vision in an illicit and unjust way." Although no such heavy artillery is deployed as in the previous section the line of attack is similar. Bleeker urges, in extenuation, that in the phenomenology of religion

> [t]he principles of the epochè and of the eidetic vision are used in a figurative sense. This cannot be blamed, provided that it is clearly stated in which manner this scientific technique is made use of. Personally I never let any doubt exist as to this question. It could perhaps be considered whether these terms, which obviously create confusion, ought to be dropped. But one does not see that the phenomenology of religion would be helped by this measure. Moreover it is a well known fact, that there exist students of the phenomenology of religion – certainly not the less prominent scholars – who never use the Husserlian terminology though they actually apply these principles.[14]

10 Hans H. Penner, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

11 See Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1975), p. 233.

12 C. Jouco Bleeker, *The Sacred Bridge: Researches into the Nature and Structure of Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), p. 8.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4, see van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 688.

14 C. Jouco Bleeker, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Bleeker is careful to place his view on the relationship between phenomenology in philosophy and in religion in a broader context. In the philosophical context, he emphasises that "the phenomenological principle is a method which can and actually is applied to different branches of science,"[15] thus universalising it beyond the domain of philosophy; and in the religious context, he emphasises that "in my opinion the phenomenology of religion is an *empirical* science without philosophical aspirations."[16] This allows him to claim that the phenomenology of religion makes figurative use of the concepts associated with the phenomenological method. This reading of Bleeker's position (which seems milder than that of Penner) is endorsed by Douglas Allen.[17]

Bleeker insists that the 'phenomenology of religion' is both a 'scientific method' and 'an independent science' and that "a great deal of unnecessary confusion and polemics could be avoided if it was generally recognized that the word could be used in a double sense."[18] The difference between Penner and Bleeker seems to lie in the fact that while Penner sees phenomenology of religion as *independent of* philosophical phenomenology, Bleeker sees it as independent in the sense of becoming *independent from* philosophical phenomenology:

> Since 1887 the phenomenology of religion has successfully developed. Gradually it evolved into an independent branch of the science of religion, approaching the religious phenomena in a specific manner. In order to understand this working procedure one should keep in mind that several students of the phenomenology of religion have been influenced by the philosophical phenomenology of which E. Husserl is the chief exponent, or at least have borrowed their ideological apparatus from that branch of philosophy. The Husserlian phenomenology is a theory of knowledge, i.e. a so-called science of pure consciousness. We can skip any further exposition of the contents of this type of philosophy as being unessential for the course of our argument. Full attention should only be paid to the method, by which Husserl tried to detect pure consciousness, because this method had been taken over by many

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 7, emphasis added.
[17] Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 278.
[18] C. Jouco Bleeker, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

> students of the phenomenology of religion. It comprises two principles, namely the epochè and the eidetic vision.[19]

The two principles are then expounded in a manner in which they come to bear a family resemblance with but are not identical with their Husserlian connotation:

> The first principle means the suspension of judgment. In using the epochè one puts oneself into the position of the listener, who does not judge according to preconceived notions. Applied to the phenomenology of religion, this means that this science cannot concern itself with the question of the truth of religion. Phenomenology must begin by accepting as proper objects of study all phenomena that are professed to be religious. Subsequently the attempt may come to distinguish what is genuinely religious from what is spurious. The second principle, that of the eidetic vision, can easily be understood. It has as its aim the search of the eidos, that is the essentials of religious phenomena.[20]

It is difficult to entirely dissociate the respective positions of Penner and Bleeker from their assessments of the indebtedness of van der Leeuw to philosophical phenomenology in the first place. The respective positions of Penner and Bleeker seem in part to reflect their different assessments of the degree to which they acknowledge van der Leeuw's indebtedness to philosophical phenomenology. For Penner such indebtedness is virtually non-existent and at most forced. Bleeker, however, acknowledges such indebtedness but considers it essentially figurative. However, the independence which the phenomenological method in the study of religion achieves over time, from whatever its genetic connection or otherwise might be with philosophical phenomenology, is clearly illustrated by Geo Widengren's treatment of the phenomenological method. He identifies van der Leeuw as "the first to formulate two principles of great value to phenomenological research:" *epoché* and *eidós*, although he does not fail to note that van der Leeuw himself was "not always true to his own principles."[21] Widengren refers to Chantepie de la Saussaye, E.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Geo Widengren, "An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion," in Walter H. Capps, ed., *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972), p. 143.

Lehmann, W. Brede Kristensen, Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto, C. J. Bleeker, K. Goldammer, R. Pettazzoni, M. Eliade et al. but not to Husserl in this context. Nevertheless, it is clear that Bleeker and Widengren are less extreme in distancing phenomenology as employed in philosophy, from phenomenology as employed in the study of religion.

III

It is clear that the word phenomenology in philosophy has been employed hitherto, in the context of philosophy, to refer to Husserlian phenomenology and that, in this context, the words *epoché* and *eidós* have played a significant role. These words are regularly employed in the phenomenology of religion, on the one hand, and play a very significant role in Husserlian phenomenology on the other, and hence are bound to figure prominently in the discussion of any relationship between the two. Much of recent scholarship on the relationship between the two has concluded that although the nomenclative borrowing is not insignificant, too much importance must also not be attached to it at the same time. The judgement of Eric J. Sharpe in the matter seems to reflect a widely held view:

> Husserl's influence, and that of the school he founded, was widespread, but he did not affect greatly the course of the phenomenology of religion, except in the area of general approach. Few historians of religion were willing or able to follow the philosophical phenomenologists into the obscure hinterland of their thought; a partial exception was van der Leeuw, though even in this case it is difficult to be sure of the extent of the Husserlian influence. Nevertheless Husserl did provide future phenomenologists of religion with two important concepts, or principles of understanding: *epochê* and *eidetic vision*.[22]

More recent work seems to indicate that the indebtedness of the phenomenology of religion to Husserlian phenomenology may extend even further. This point of further movement is provided by a further consideration of what constitute the basic elements of

22 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 224.

Husserlian phenomenology. Douglas Allen identifies the following "five characteristics of philosophical phenomenology"[23] of which Husserl is regarded as the "founder and most influential philosopher."

1. Descriptive nature
2. Opposition to reductionism
3. Intentionality
4. Bracketing (*epoché*)
5. Eidetic vision.

> Out of these the one term which students of religion might wish to be told more about is intentionality: "A subject always 'intends' an object and 'intentionality' refers to the property of all consciousness as consciousness of something. All acts of consciousness are directed towards the experience of something, the intentional object. For Husserl, who took the term from his teacher Franz Brentano (1838–1917), intentionality is a way of describing how consciousness constitutes phenomena."[24]

Douglas Allen goes on to point out that "out of the five characteristics of phenomenological method listed above, intentionality and the *epoche*, though central, have not been universally accepted by phenomenologists. Almost all phenomenologists, however, have upheld a descriptive phenomenology that is anti-reductionist and that involves insight into essential structures."

This is the crucial point: that "almost all phenomenologists" regard the eidetic vision as constituting an integral part of philosophical phenomenology of the Husserlian variety.[25] A brief explanatory note on eidetic vision may not be out of place: "the intuition of essences, often described as 'eidetic vision' or 'eidetic reduction,' is related to the Greek term *eidos*, which Husserl adopted from its Platonic meaning to designate 'universal essences.' Such essences express the 'whatness' of things, the necessary and invariant features of phenomena that allow us to recognize phenomena as phenomena of a certain kind."[26]

23 Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
24 *Ibid.*
25 Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–120.
26 Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

Thus intuition of essences or *Wesensschau* is a quintessentially phenomenological procedure, and, on account of its centrality to the phenomenological scheme of things, its mode of operation must be fully and correctly grasped. This procedure is now outlined: "In the 'intuition of essences' *(Wesensschau)*, the phenomenologist attempts to disengage essential structures embodied in particular phenomena. One begins with particular data: the specific phenomena as expressions of intentional experiences. The central aim of the phenomenological method is to disclose the essential 'whatness' or structure embodied in the particular data."[27]

The manner in which this insight is gained is as follows: "One gains insight into meaning by the method of 'free variation.' After assembling a variety of particular phenomena, the phenomenologist searches for the invariant core that constitutes the essential meaning of the phenomena. The phenomena, subjected to a process of free variation, assume certain forms that are considered to be accidental or inessential, in the sense that the phenomenologist can go beyond the limits imposed by such forms without destroying the basic character or intentionality of one's data."[28]

Let us examine an actual example for a moment. We know that a triangle has three sides but do they constitute its essential structure, and, if so, how? "Thus in the case of the triangle we shall have to determine whether three sides, three angles, and certain shapes and sizes of these sides and angles are necessary to them, or required by the essence 'triangle,' or whether they are merely compatible with it." Spiegelberg points out that

> [t]he way to settle such questions is chiefly by an operation which Husserl called "free imaginative variation" (*freie Variation in der Phantasie*), but which is still in need of fuller analysis and description. It may involve two things: the attempt either (1) to leave off certain components completely or (2) to replace them by others. Such experiments in the imagination can lead to three possible results: Either the essence in the sense described, i.e., the fundamental structure designated by the general name, will remain unaffected by such an omission or substitution, which proves the omitted or replaced component to be unessential (e.g., alphabetical symbols or specific sizes or angles or sides); or such an omission or substitution, while conceivable, will change the character or gestalt of the entity fundamentally (e.g., increasing the sum of the angles in a triangle beyond two straight angles will convert it from a two-dimensional into a spherical triangle); or it will not only affect the total configuration but "explode" the whole essence, since its components are completely incompatible among themselves (e.g., a triangle without angles or a plane triangle in Euclidean space with the sum of its angles equal to three straight angles). In the first case the component in question is admitted by the essence, and stands in essentially possible connection with it (essential possibility). In the second it is relatively necessary to it, i.e., as long as the specific essence is to be maintained (relative essential necessity). The third case, where the components are completely incompatible among themselves, is one of absolute essential necessity.[29]

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*

It was necessary to go into such detail to recognise the centrality of the eidetic vision to Husserlian phenomenology.

Douglas Allen has demonstrated how the phenomenology of religion employs such procedures as well, with this crucial difference: "Husserl proposed that all phenomena were constituted by consciousness and that, in the intuition of essences, we could eliminate the particular, actual given datum and move on to the plane of 'pure possibility.' Most phenomenologists who use a method of *Wesensschau* propose that historical phenomena have a kind of priority, that we must substitute for Husserl's imaginary variation an actual variation of historical data, and that the particular phenomena are not constituted by us but are the source of our constitution and judgment."[30]

The application of this procedure in phenomenology can be demonstrated both at a general and at a concrete level. At a general level "for example, the variation of a great variety of religious phenomena may disclose that the unique structures of monotheism do not constitute the essential core or universal structure of all religious experience" on the one hand and on the other, for example, "free variation might reveal that certain essential structures of 'transcendence' constitute an invariant core of religious experience. When the univer-

[29] Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 700.

[30] Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

sal essence is grasped, the phenomenologist has achieved the eidetic intuition, or the fulfilled *Wesensschau*."[31]

A more concrete example is provided in some detail by Douglas Allen in his book *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions*:

> By the 'method of invariance,' the phenomenologist of religion searches for the *invariant core* which constitutes the essential meaning of the religious phenomena. The snake example, which is already presumed to be a variation of a certain type (erotic, lunar, etc.), is subjected to a process of free variation. A variety of snake phenomena assume certain forms which can be considered 'accidental,' in the sense that the phenomenologist can go 'beyond' the 'limits' imposed by such structures and not destroy the basic character of his or her data. For example, the particular aquatic or earth structure disclosed by some examples of snake hierophanies does not reveal the invariable meaning of snake phenomena.
>
> Through free variation, the phenomenologist gradually sees that snake phenomena assume forms which can be regarded as 'essential,' in the sense that such structures impose certain 'limits' beyond which one changes the basic 'whatness' of the data under investigation; one cannot 'remove' such 'elements' without destroying the basic nature of the data.
>
> Such essential insight is not instantaneous. What Husserl calls an 'empty intention' is the vague appearance of certain permanence within the variations. Amidst the diverse revalorizations, one gradually deciphers a certain *structural identity*.
>
> When the phenomenologist of religion has grasped the invariant core which constitutes the essential meaning of the data, he or she then has 'achieved' the eidetic intuition. For Eliade, the invariant core which constitutes the essential meaning of the snake phenomena was understood in terms of a structural 'web' of lunar symbolism. The essential structure embodied in the particular snake examples was grasped as inexhaustible life repeating itself rhythmically.[32]

It is clear, therefore, that the parallel between Husserlian phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion extends further than was apparent at first sight. Penner saw little in common between the two; Bleeker saw a greater, if figurative, connection, and Allen has identified a deeper and more methodological connection. Are the ties between the two capable of being extended even further?

31 *Ibid.*

32 Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Direction* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), pp. 193–194.

V

Husserlian phenomenology is one strand, albeit a major strand, in the broader web of philosophical phenomenology; but philosophical phenomenology itself forms part of a more general phenomenological movement.

The key to this situation is provided by the word phenomenology itself. Herbert Spiegelberg notes that the problem of defining the term 'phenomenological' "begins with the denotation of the term phenomenology. Were it not older than the phenomenological movement proper, the question of delineation would be much simpler and less urgent. But the fact is that until about 1910 the word was practically everyone's for the asking."[33] Despite its multiple heritage, the word seems to be singularly associated with one attitude in all its uses, which seems to constitute a somewhat singular circumstance. Thomas Ryba has discussed its pre–1910 usage more carefully than perhaps any other scholar,[34] and Herbert Spiegelberg has done the same for the post–1910 period. Moreover, Douglas Allen, like Eric J. Sharpe,[35] identifies another clear nonphilosophical use of the term *within the study of religion*, in the sense of "the descriptive, systematic, comparative study of religion, in which scholars assemble groups of religious phenomena in order to disclose their major aspects and to formulate their typologies. This phenomenology as comparative religion had roots independent of philosophical phenomenology."[36]

What is strikingly common to all these uses is an inherent antireductionist stance, namely, an emphasis on *description rather than explanation*. This is a significant and surprising coincidence. Moreover, not only does the word phenomenology have "both philosophical and non-philosophical roots,"[37] its philosophical roots are twofold as noted earlier, involving in one case the broader meaning of any descriptive study and a narrower one of a specific philosophical

33 Herberr Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

34 Thomas Ryba, *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning in the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

35 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

36 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," p. 273.

37 *Ibid.*

movement.[38] In all these connotations the emphasis on description instead of explanation is firmly established.

One may now move beyond the word to the movement it is associated with. Herbert Spiegelberg has outlined the movement as a whole, in terms of the phenomenological method, in response to the question: What is phenomenology? As the movement has produced a diversity of results, it is best to focus on the method, on which there is more agreement than on the results, and what constitutes the core of the method.

According to Spiegelberg, the method consists of *one* negative and *seven* positive steps. "This negative part [consists of] the identification and deliberate elimination of theoretical constructs and symbolisms in favour of return to the unadulterated phenomena ... a determined effort to undo the effect of habitual patterns of thought and return to the pristine innocence of first seeing."[39] In fact, in this respect, "phenomenology stands for a kind of rebellion against the trend in modern science which begins with simplifying abstractions and ends with a minimum vocabulary of scientific concepts."[40]

To turn now to the positive steps, they may be enumerated in the following order:

1. investigating particular phenomena;
2. investigating general essences;
3. apprehending essential relationships among essences;
4. watching modes of appearing;
5. watching the constitution of phenomena in consciousness;
6. suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena;
7. interpreting the meaning of phenomena.[41]

According to Spiegelberg "[t]he first three steps have been accepted, at least implicitly, and practiced by all those who have aligned themselves with the Phenomenological Movement; the later ones only by a smaller group. There is in fact no reason why even the very first step should not be adopted by itself, regardless of the later ones."[42]

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38 *Ibid.*
39 Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 680.
40 *Ibid.*, p. 681.
41 *Ibid.*
42 *Ibid.*, p. 682.

Spiegelberg identifies the gestaltists as doing just that; one could say the same of the descriptive comparative study of religion.

Before we proceed further, however, the method outlined skeletally needs to be fleshed out a little further. Spiegelberg does so by illustrating its application to the phenomenon of "*force*."

One first takes the negative step of conforming to the phenomenological "protest against [the] narrowing down of experience in the name of Occam's razor,"[43] for while "in Whitehead's words, simplicity should be sought but distrusted," at the same time "it remains true that, if we want to explore the finer structures of phenomena for their own sakes, simplicity and economy are instruments that are both blunt and blunting. The genuine call to know calls for the spirit of generosity rather than that of economy, for reverence rather than for subjugation, for the lens rather than for the hammer."[44]

We are now ready to embark on the positive steps, untrammelled by "positivism" and an urge towards uncritical oversimplification. How, then, would our phenomenological appreciation of "force" now differ than what might be otherwise?

1. *Investigating Particular Phenomena*

Consider such expressions as: "using force in opening a door," or "the car struck the tree with great force." While investigating this phenomenon, one must not confuse force with *power* (which stands for something merely potential) or *energy* (in the sense of capacity or ability to do work, as physics defines it) or *cause* (which is a casual relation in a sense force here is not).[45] After a detailed analysis, in the course of which the use of force is brought in relation to the human body as well (while avoiding anthropomorphism), Spiegelberg arrives at the result of his investigation: by describing force, after Leibniz, as "a mean between the faculty of acting and action itself."[46]

In investigating the particular phenomenon of force Spiegelberg went through the phases of (a) *phenomenological intuiting* ("looking

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43 *Ibid.*, p. 681.
44 *Ibid.*, p. 680.
45 *Ibid.*, pp. 683–684.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 695.

and listening" in colloquial terms) that is, being open to the phenomenon is uncritical absorption;[47] (b) *phenomenological analysing* ("don't think but look" in colloquial terms) in such a way that instead of letting phenomena flow into pre-fabricated linguistic categories, original ones are devised if necessary. This step does not involve the dissection of phenomena into separate parts but "comprises the distinguishing of the constituents of the phenomena as well as the exploration of their relations to and connections with adjacent phenomena;"[48] and (c) *phenomenological describing*. Two points seem worthy of special note here. First, while "description is primarily predication," yet "predication, as phenomenology has brought out increasingly, presupposes pre-predicative experience" and it is this which "deserves first attention, even if, for purposes of communication, we cannot dispense with descriptions."[49] Second, as it is not possible to describe anything fully:

> Phenomenological description in particular, can never be more than selective; it is impossible to exhaust all the properties, especially the relational properties, of any object or phenomenon. But selection may be a virtue as well as a necessity. It forces us to concentrate on the central or decisive characteristics of the phenomenon and to abstract from its accidentals. To this extent description already involves a consideration of essences. The next step to be considered is our scale of the phenomenological model.[50]

VI

This might be a good moment to pause and reflect on this model. The reader might recall that, at one level, Spiegelberg was content to identify the phenomenological method with the first step (discussed above) alone. The remark can now be appreciated more clearly, especially as the first step itself involved three elements. At this critical juncture Spiegelberg offers the following helpful comment:

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 682.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 691.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 693.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 694.

> Intuiting, analyzing, and describing particulars in their full concreteness may be considered a common program for all those who think of themselves as members of the Phenomenological Movement. This does not mean that they practice these steps equally, and equally well. In fact, in the recent development of phenomenology tbey have been taken too much for granted, and the existentialist emphasis on hermeneutic interpretation has seriously interfered with it. On the other hand this program is by no means restricted to phenomenologists in the self-declared sense. Thus, the gestaltists and other psychological groups are in substantial agreement with this part of the phenomenological method and have practiced it extensively and impressively. But this is not the place to give proper credit to such allies of phenomenology. Let it suffice to point out the common concern.[51]

VII

We may now discuss our illustration of the phenomenological method, as applied to "force" à la Spiegelberg, albeit in a more abbreviated fashion. Even while discussing the first step, considerations of space compelled us to telescope the consideration of the three elements in relation to it. In illustrating the next step we shall confine ourselves briefly to the distinctive feature about *force*, which the application of the phenomenological method to it throws up in bold relief.

2. *Investigating General Essences*

How the particular leads to the general is well-illustrated by the example of the colour red. Thus "using the particular red of an individual rose as a point of departure we can see it as an instance of a certain shade of red in general. But we can *also* see it as exemplifying redness and, finally, the colour as such,"[52] a process which could lead one to identify "pure colours."[53] The point to be noted, however, is, that while "it is certainly possible to see particulars without seeing the general essence ... it is not possible to see

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 696.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 697, emphasis added.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 698.

them *as particulars* without seeing the general essence which they particularize."[54]

The general essence disclosed here in relation to force is *dynamism*, for it links up with "a sequence of typical dynamic instances, such as hurling, flinging, throwing, pushing, attaching, tackling, probing, or, going in the opposite direction, dragging, pulling, jerking."[55] Either way a "pervasive dynamic factor is disclosed."

3. *Apprehending Essential Relationships*

The central issue here is to determine what is essential and what is not; the central procedure involved is "free imaginative variation." An outline of this component of the method was presented in Spiegelberg's own words earlier. When applied to *force* it may lead to such "insights as: essentially force is extended over an area; essentially it has intensity; essentially it can increase or decrease; essentially it can never reach an absolute maximum."[56]

VIII

The completion of the consideration of these three steps provides us with another halting station. The reader will recall that Spiegelberg identified, at one level, the phenomenological method with the first step. Next, he identified it with the three steps just concluded. Finally he identifies with all the steps, four of which remain to be presented.

IX

4. *Watching Modes of Appearing*

This step is intended to alert us to the fact that "ways of appearing are usually overlooked in our preoccupation with what appears,"[57] as when the "identical colour of an object may present itself with

[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 701.
[57] *Ibid.*

different colour in different lighting."[58] A more dramatic example is provided by the fact that "the same shape can present itself through very different perspectives such as sight and touch."[59] In the case of force, the acoustic, the tactile, and the kinaesthetic aspects might represent different modes of appearance.

5. *Exploring the Constitution of Phenomenon in Consciousness*

The typical example here is "the experience of getting oriented to a new city, whose 'picture' gradually takes shape in our mind."[60] This is an experience shared by many a traveller, hence it need not detain us long. In the context of *force* we can see this occurring in parts of our body which, originally without "charge" become "alert" in a particular "location" and may also become tense and contract or enlarge.

6. *Suspending Belief in Existence*

This is the famous phenomenological reduction and Spiegelberg has a lot to say about it.[61] It should suffice, for our purposes, to note that suspension is not negation and is only resorted to focus on *what* it is as distinguished from *that* it is. At another level, if we study the constitution of a phenomenon without being concerned with its reality, "we may prepare an answer to how much our consciousness may have contributed to the constitution of the phenomenon."[62] The example of force is particularly illuminating as when we might say that they pushed as "one man." Only by suspending belief in literal reality can the expression and its force make sense.

7. *Interpreting Concealed Messages*

Since all phenomenology may be regarded as a search for meaning, Spiegelberg, who introduces this step with a caveat,[63] suggests that

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 705.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 706.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 708–712.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 710.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 712.

"hermeneutic phenomenology," with which we are now concerned, must have as its goal "the discovery of meanings which are not immediately manifest to our intuiting, analyzing, and describing."[64] Spiegelberg's application of this step to *force* is so suggestive that it deserves being cited in extenso:

> What could a hermeneutic interpretation contribute to a phenomenology of force? Any such attempt would clearly depend on the assumption that force as we experience it contains meanings which allow for and demand interpretative reading. This would certainly be a highly speculative assumption, which only a metaphysics on the scale of Leibniz or Schopenhauer could encourage. Nevertheless it might be legitimate to engage in considerations on a more limited scale in connection with the phenomena of force as experienced in our own body. Could there be any underlying sense in the possession and use of such forces by an "incarnated" human existence? Certainly such a being as man makes use of the forces which are at his disposal. To him, force is more than a brute fact. It gives him some measure of control over an area of the world, however limited. On the biological plane at least, force has a definite function. This may give an indication of the possibility that even in the framework of bodily existence force plays a certain role and has a meaning to which we have no immediate access. But I would hesitate to make any more concrete suggestions as to the way in which force, and particularly our use of it, can have specific meanings which only a hermeneutic interpretation can reveal. Let it suffice to have suggested that there is scope and reason to look for deeper and hidden meanings wherever the conscious meanings do not adequately account for a phenomenon in our experience and for the total pattern in which it occurs. But such a suggestion does not mean that we can regard the rights of hermeneutics as established. For it rests on assumptions which can be justified phenomenologically only by the ultimate intuitive verification of our hermeneutic anticipations of "sense."[65]

X

If we now set van der Leeuw's description of the phenomenological method in the study of religion beside what has just been discussed, the resemblances are hard to miss.

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 714–715.

To begin with, van der Leeuw takes the negative step by distinguishing phenomenology from the poetry, history, psychology, philosophy and the theology of religion.[66] The fact that he distinguishes it from the theology and psychology of religion is as crucial here, as it was for Husserl and Spiegelberg to distinguish their enterprise from traditional empiricism or positivism and the "sense-organ" bias of previous studies.[67] They are as committed as the phenomenologists, in relation to phenomenology, to the "perpetual task ... to free itself from every non-phenomenological standpoint and to retain its own liberty, while it conserves the inestimable value of its position always anew."[68]

Next we turn to a consideration of the positive steps delineated by Spiegelberg, in the form of a chart:

SPIEGELBERG	VAN DER LEEUW
Investigating particular phenomena	Identifying and "assigning names" to (particular) phenomena such as sacrifice, prayer, etc.[69]
Investigating general essences	van der Leeuw actually quotes Husserl here: that the "essential" is to be obtained through phenomenological reduction.[70]
Apprehending essential relationships among essences	van der Leeuw: "The understood stood experience thus becomes coordinated, in and by understanding, within the experience of some yet wider connection. *Every individual experience, therefore, is already connected*; and every connection remains always experience; this is what we mean by speaking of *types*, together with structure."[71]

[66] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 685–688.

[67] Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 679–681.

[68] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 688.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 674.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 676.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 673.

SPIEGELBERG	VAN DER LEEUW
Watching modes of appearing	van der Leeuw: "The phenomenon ...; its entire essence is given in its 'appearance', and its appearance to 'someone'. If (finally) this 'someone' begins to discuss what 'appears', then phenomenology arises."[72] This may be compared with Spiegelberg.[73]
Watching the constitution of phenomena in consciousness	In phenomenology of religion it involves the other's consciousness as much as one's own, see below.
Suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena	van der Leeuw: "... it must withdraw to one side, and endeavour to observe what appears while adopting the attitude of intellectual suspense."[74]
Interpreting the meaning of phenomena	van der Leeuw: "It has, in fact, one sole desire; *to testify* to what has been manifested to it. This it can do only by indirect methods, by a second experience of the event, by a thorough reconstruction; ... to see face to face is denied us. But much can be observed even in a mirror; and it is possible to speak about things seen."[75]

XI

Four approaches to the overall relationship between the use of phenomenology in philosophy in general, and the phenomenology of religion, may thus be identified. The identification of these ap-

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 672.
[73] Herbert Spiegelberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 687–690.
[74] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 688.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 677.

proaches is somewhat convoluted by the fact that the term phenomenology in its philosophical background can possess two distinct senses: (1) a wider sense as "any descriptive study of a given subject matter or as a discipline describing observable phenomena" – a largely pre-twentieth century usage – and (2) "a narrower twentieth-century term as a philosophical approach utilizing a phenomenological method."[76] It is further convoluted by the fact that the term "phenomenology of religion" is also employed at least in a double sense: (1) one sense which is "perhaps best characterized as the 'comparative monograph,' in which a study of one phenomenon or a group of phenomena, is undertaken 'across the board'" and another in which it (2) wishes "to combine complete accuracy of scholarship with complete sympathy of treatment to ensure complete understanding of the religious beliefs and practices of other human beings."[77] Nevertheless, without losing awareness of these distinct usages, it seems possible to identify four broad degrees of connection between these two as envisaged by scholars:

(1) According to one school of thought, there is no connection between the two except a merely verbal one. Certain defining aspects of the Husserlian phenomenological enterprise, according to this view, are diametrically opposed to the phenomenology of religion. Hans H. Penner is a strong advocate of this position.
(2) According to another school, the links between the two, though not formal, are stronger, and the conceptual orientations display a strong resemblance, if not even some measure of dependence. C. J. Bleeker and Eric J. Sharpe may be placed in this category.
(3) According to a third school, the connections run deeper. Willard Oxtoby and Douglas Allen may be placed in this category.
(4) The above three categories primarily focused on the relationship between the twentieth-century Husserlian phenomenological method and its connections with the phenomenology of religion. If, however, the term of reference is slightly altered and the relationship of the phenomenology of religion is contextualised

[76] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," p. 274.
[77] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 246, 237.

in relation to the Phenomenological Movement as a whole, then the relationship between the two can be considered as even closer. Such a view is suggested by the work of Thomas Ryba[78] and by a comparison of the phenomenological method, as explicated by Herbert Spiegelberg, and that of Gerardus van der Leeuw in the previous section. It is further striking that while Ryba tends to interpret phenomenology in the "wider sense" and Spiegelberg inclines more towards the "narrower" sense,[79] an antireductionistic approach remains common to *both* these senses, as well as common between these two approaches and the phenomenology of religion.[80]

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78 See Thomas Ryba, *op. cit.*, passim.
79 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," p. 274.
80 *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 274, 280.

CHAPTER V

Can the Phenomenological Method be Applied to a Single Religious Datum?

The phenomenology of religion[1] typically deals with religious data derived from several religious traditions.[2] This aspect of the phenomenology of religion has been so prominent that sometimes the two expressions – the phenomenology of religion and comparative religion – are almost used synonymously.[3] There is the further fact that in the understanding of its most illustrious spokesmen, the phenomenology of religion has almost always been associated with a comparison of data provided by different traditions.[4] The data may be

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1 Phenomenology as a development in modern philosophy and the phenomenology of religion as a development in the study of religion are historically associated, but as intellectual enterprises are quite distinct; see C. J. Bleeker, "The Relation of the History of Religions to kindred religious sciences, particularly Theology, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* 1 (1954), p. 147. Hence the need to use the full expression 'Phenomenology of Religion' even at the risk of some awkwardness. Sometimes, however, the expression 'phenomenological method' may be substituted for it; see Michael Pye, "Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1:2–3 (June–September 1974), pp. 108–115.
2 See W.B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), passim; G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), Vols. I and II, passim; Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 21–26, etc.
3 See Michael Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
4 Thus for W. B. Kristensen, according to Hendrik Kraemer, phenomenology of religion is "the systematically pursued comparative endeavour to interpret and understand (not explain) religious phenomena of the same category (sacrifice, prayer, sacraments, etc.) *appearing in different religions* to get at their inner meaning" (W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. xxi, emphasis added).

grouped under a *single* heading but the data are drawn from a plurality of traditions. According to W. B. Kristensen: "All phenomenology is indeed based on comparative observation. Phenomenology of Religion is the comparative study of the history of religion."[5]

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the following questions:

(1) Has the phenomenology of religion hitherto always been comparative in nature?

(2) Does this comparative element constitute a limitation of its method or only of its scope?

(3) If the limitation is not one of method bnt of scope, then can the scope of the application of the method of the phenomenology of religion be extended to cover the case of a single phenomenon within a tradition?

I

It has already been indicated that, since its very inception the phenomenology of religion has had a comparative orientation. The various studies, which either claim to come under or are accepted to fall within the umbrella of this term, have maintained this orientation. This holds true for the work of W. B. Kristensen, G. van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade and Joachim Wach. The word "phenomenon," as understood in these studies, refers to the categories under which religious data have been assembled, such as prayer, sacraments or worship, etc. This is, however, not the only understanding of the word to be met with. The word has also been used to refer to an entire religious tradition in its totality, as for instance, to Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. As noted in an earlier chapter (see chapter III), Edward J. Jurji thus speaks of the 'phenomenon of Hinduism,' the 'phenomenon of Buddhism,'[6] etc. This approach was also tried, in part, by G. van der Leeuw.[7] Yet both of these scholars, even when they talk of entire traditions, do not lose sight of the comparative orientation.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 418.

[6] Edward J. Jurji, *The Phenomenology of Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), passim.

[7] See G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Part Five.

The word phenomenon, however, need not be used to refer only to a religious class or category such as prayer, or to an entire tradition, such as Buddhism. It may be used in a third sense, to refer only to a specific and particular phenomenon within a religion. That the word phenomenon could possess this sense in the phenomenology of religion as well is semantically obvious, but typically has not been so used in the phenomenology of religion, wherein a comparative orientation prevails.

II

But what is the precise nature of this 'restriction' or 'limitation' to a comparative orientation? Does the phenomenology of religion have a comparative orientation by choice or is it because its method requires it? – and would be unavailing without it?

W. B. Kristensen seems to imply that the understanding of a single phenomenon is the *goal* of the phenomenology of religion. "Phenomenology makes use of comparison only to gain a deeper insight into the self-subsistent, not the relative, meaning of *each* of the historical data."[8] But although this is the goal, the *method* which must be employed to achieve this goal has to be comparative. "In order to understand particular (historical) data, we must frequently (and perhaps always) make use of the generalizations which are the results of comparative research."[9] Thus inasmuch as we are concerned with the phenomenology of religion as a method, the indication is that more than one phenomenon needs to be investigated, even though we may want to understand only one phenomenon.

G. van der Leeuw, on the other hand, uses more widely dispersed data in the sweep and scope of his study, a study which includes some comparison of the religious traditions themselves as a type of phenomena. Thus van der Leeuw's *goal* is broader, but his *method*, unlike Kristensen's, turns out to be one which is more capable of being applied by itself to a single phenomenon than Kristensen's. For in outlining his method,[10] G. van der Leeuw emphasises structural

[8] W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[10] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 688.

connections and maintains that one can see structural connections within "a historical situation."[11]

The fact that G. van der Leeuw's method, like the most general statement of the method of phenomenology in general,[12] is capable of being applied to a single phenomenon enables the frontiers of our study to be pushed further.

So far the phenomenologist has almost always approached his or her task with a comparative orientation. What happens when the student of religion divests himself or herself of the comparative orientation and chooses to function within the framework of a tradition on the terms of the tradition alone, maintaining "the viewpoint of the believer"?

The prospect thus presented is exciting. Until now the possibilities of the method of the phenomenology of religion applied *within* a tradition to a single item[13] do not seem to have been either theoretically considered, or practically tried.[14] An attempt was just made in this section to generate the possibility of carrying out such an exercise under the banner of the phenomenology of religion and the possibility of such an enterprise was established. Should this be considered possible, one more question remains to be asked before such a step may be seriously entertained: even if feasible, is such a step desirable? What do we hope to achieve by carrying out the operation of phenomenology of religion of a single religious datum within a tradition? A preliminary exercise in the new approach as carried out in the next section may suggest an answer.

11 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 673, emphasis added.

12 See Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), Vol. II, Chapter XIV.

13 The membership of a tradition here must be carefully understood. One may distinguish between the notions of formal and methodological membership of a tradition. Most of us are born into a religion and more or less continue to function within its framework. We are thus members of that tradition by birth. Does this mean that no "outsider" can carry out a study of an item within the tradition - that no non-Muslim can ever apply the phenomenological method to a religious datum within Islam? No; he can, but he must undergo "temporary conversion" and for the duration of the application function as a Muslim.

14 An attempt has recently been made to carry out a "structural analysis of a ritual, viz. the Hindu ceremony of *upanayana*" but it may be noted that although the phenomenology of religion is concerned with 'structure' this is quite different from 'the structural method,' a method which, as a method, is located at the antipodes of phenomenology of religion. "Even though the structuralist too aims at understanding, it is not the same as the *Verstehen* of the phenomenologist" (see Reinhard Pummer, "Recent Publications on the Methodology of the Science of Religion," *Numen* 22:3 [Dec. 1974], pp. 178, 179).

III

Let us look at the Vedas of Hinduism, first historically and then phenomenologically, in the manner discussed above, and see what difference, if any, it makes in the treatment of our subject.

A historical study of the Vedas would seek to establish its relationship with the Avesta and with the Aryans, and with the general movement of the Indo-European peoples; would deal with the geographical expansion of the Aryans as reflected in the Vedas; would emphasise the *RgVeda*; would discuss the circumstances in which the *AtharvaVeda* came to be accepted as one of the four Vedas; would then discuss the rise of the non-Vedic systems of Buddhism and Jainism and their attitude towards the Vedas, as well as the emergence of the Agamic tradition. It will try to show how much of present-day Hinduism is or is not Vedic, and how the concept of the Veda has varied, and how some sections of the Vedas are too late to be regarded as 'authentic.' It would end perhaps with a wry comment on the spokesmen of Hinduism who palm off every idea on the Veda and would find further proof of Hinduism's lack of historical sense in this.[15]

Now how does one visualise the Vedas, this time not just as a text, originally transmitted orally for centuries, to be dissected for its linguistic layers and historical content, but as something to which the Hindu tradition wistfully harks back. How do the Vedas come through, looked upon not as a historical *fact*, but as a Hindu phenomenon?

The Vedas take on a new aspect with this new approach. They seem to symbolise the yearning of a people to preserve their spiritual

15 See R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The Vedic Age* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), passim; Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), passim; etc.

experience and insights and to transmit them to those who come after them. The Vedic canon, as we have it today, becomes the record of the religious experiences of a people,[16] as they gradually spread over India and pass through various phases of religious development: from worship of forces of nature, to ritualism, to the questioning of ritualism, to philosophy. The incorporation of the *AtharvaVeda* is now seen in another (and to a Hindu its proper) perspective – to achieve as comprehensive a compilation of religious experience as possible.[17] Even when the Veda as a canon is defined, the Veda as a phenomenon continues to flourish. The *Mahābhārata* is referred to as the fifth Veda; indeed any major work becomes a fifth Veda, such as the *Tiruvāyamoḷi* of Nammāḷvār.[18] An effort is made to obliterate the distinction between *āgama* and Veda – to see them *both* as repositories of spiritual experience in all its rich, even bewildering, variety.[19] Suggestions are made that the Buddhist and Jaina canons are as sacred as the Vedas.[20] When Islam arrives, an effort is made to incorporate its presence in the Vedas, through an Allopaniṣad, an effort which, from a purely historical point of view, would be dismissed as a forgery![21] And in our own times we see a move to accept the accounts of the most sacred moments of the Christian experience as Vedic, if not a part of the Veda itself.[22]

When the Vedas are thus viewed as a phenomenon, and their underlying structure identified as the preservation of the religious

16 For a critical discussion of this point see Brian A. Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 61–70.

17 For more on this see K. Satchidananda Murty, *Vedic Hermeneutics* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), Chapter III.

18 K. M. Sen, *Hinduism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 92.

19 T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana Ltd., 1960), p. 180.

20 See K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), pp. 195, 200; K. Satchidananda Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 232–237.

21 See Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), Vol. II, p. 534.

22 See Juan Mascaro, *The Bhagavadgita* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), Preface.

experience in all its comprehensiveness in space and time, we gain a new understanding of the Veda, of why to the Hindu it is endless[23] and sacred; an understanding which, it would appear, must remain inaccessible on a purely historical approach. This seems to suggest not only that there could be, but even that there should be, a phenomenology of religion as applied to a single religious datum.[24]

IV

Another item from within the Hindu tradition which could serve as an illustration of the application of the phenomenology of religion to a single religious datum is the *śiva-liṅga*, an application which is carried out in Chapter X of this book and therefore not discussed here. Exercises of this kind however do point to a larger issue: that of the precise relationship between the phenomenology of religion and the comparative study of religious phenomena.

Indeed, the exact nature of the connection between the phenomenology of religion and the comparative study of religious phenomena (or comparative religion sensu stricto) is also in need of some clarification, specially as what was said earlier does not seem to leave much daylight between the two. This might even be a new question for many and this might itself testify to its analytical potency, the question being, to state it more sharply: where do the two meet and wherein do the two differ?[25]

23 *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa Kāṭhaka* I, xi, 4.

24 The question as to whether Prof. Mircea Eliade of the University of Chicago was a phenomenologist of religion or not came up during a seminar at Harvard University during the Fall of 1974. The late Professor Frederick J. Streng, then a Visiting Professor at Harvard, revealed that the question was once posed to Prof. Eliade himself at Chicago. He denied being one, claiming instead to be a hermeneut. One may then wish to ask the following question: How close does hermeneutics come to being the phenomenology of religion of a single religious datum? For the fuller context see Jacques Waardenburg, "The Emergence of Science of Religion. Explanatory Theory and Hermeneutics," *Religio* 5 (1997), pp. 107–116.

25 Ninian Smart, "Comparative-Historical Method," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 3, pp. 572–574.

The question is difficult to answer because both the methods tend to cover similar ground. The way in which this is done, however, displays differences in nuance. One distinction, which is nomenclatural in nature, may be dealt with first, before one turns to analytical differences. It has been pointed out that "there was a reaction in the early twentieth century against the use of the word *comparative*, since Western and colonialist assumptions often entered into the making of comparisons."[26] It could thus be suggested that "this criticism contributed to the fashionability of the phrase 'phenomenology of religion' as an alternative way of labeling the enterprise."[27]

The differences between the comparative-historical and the phenomenological are, however, more than merely nominal and also involve shades of emphasis. A good way to see this clearly is to identify the *point* at which one becomes indistinguishable from the other. Ninian Smart writes, for instance, that the historical-critical method

> differs from psychology and phenomenology of religion, ... insofar as these disciplines content themselves with exploring timeless patterns or types of religious phenomena. Thus these disciplines may be concerned with patterns of mystical experience, for example, but not with how these patterns arise historically or to what extent they are affected by social and cultural conditions. In the discipline of psychology of religion, religious data are selected in a way that is distinct from the comparative-historical method, but the distinction between phenomenology of religion and the comparative-historical method cannot be put always so clearly. *Insofar as phenomenology also deals with various types of changes in religious phenomena over the course of history, the distinctions begin to vanish.*[28]

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 572.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 571, emphasis added. Also see p. 573, where he writes: "It follows then that in addition to relatively time-free typological comparisons there are comparisons of kinds of changes. Such a typology, which can be called a 'dynamic phenomenology,' blurs the distinction between the comparative-historical and phenomenological methods. It also takes us back to some of the early preoccupations of the comparative study of religion, namely, the delineation of the evolution of religion from animism through monotheism. Although the evolutionary model is less fashionable now than in the latter part of the nineteenth century, which saw the emergence of comparative religion as a discipline, there is still an interest in the dynamic patterns of development in society that are generated by religion – an interest stimulated by the work of Max Weber (1864–1920). An example of a recent evolutionary scheme is found in Robert N. Bellah's paper 'Religious Evolution', *American Sociological Review* 29, 1964, pp. 358–374."

Another way to examine the distinction between the two would be to introduce the issue of particularity. The phenomenological method, in its search for patterns or structures, is more geared towards noting similarities or generalities than detecting particularities. As Ninian Smart points out:

> Though it may be that a certain recurrent theme occurs in two traditions, it nevertheless has a different contextual meaning in each. For instance, there may appear to be a similar mystical experience described in Sufism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. But the meaning of the two experiences will diverge: the one involves a close unity with God, the other the attainment of ultimate emptiness. The meaning of each experience affects the way each is perceived, both because the Ṣūfī and the Mahāyāna Buddhist have different expectations leading into their experiences and also because, *ex post facto*, the experiences suggest differing accounts of the ultimate. More generally, it may be said that each tradition or subtradition is organic, in that the meaning of each of the particular elements woven together into a whole is affected by the meanings of all the other elements associated with it within the whole. Thus, because the comparative method is historical, it recognizes the importance not only of general similarities but also of the particularity of each historical context. Comparisons are therefore never quite exact but are analogical in character. Although the method upholds the value of comparisons, it nevertheless recognizes the need for contextnal modification.[29]

Another point of distinction is provided by a consideration of their aims. The comparative-historical study of religion may be said to possess two aims: (1) "to demonstrate historical connections" and (2) "to point out independent occurrences of similar phenomena." While the comparative-historical method shares both these aims, the phenomenology of religion only shares the second one. The examples of the first kind of similarities are usually explained by resorting to diffusion: "For example, early investigators who saw the similarities between ideas in the *Bhagavadgītā* and in the New Testament sup-

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 573.

posed that a single influence, one way or another informed both. The use of the swastika symbol both in India and among American Indian groups is also suggestive of very ancient diffusion."[30] Ninian Smart points out, however:

> But the most interesting cases from the theoretical angle are those where a strong degree of independence of cultural origins can be shown and yet the phenomena are similar. It is, for example, striking when the utterances of mystics in apparently independent traditions are similar. Such similarity is suggestive of at least a perennial phenomenology – that is, the existence of certain recurring, characteristic patterns of human experience – if not of a perennial philosophy. *It is partly on this basis that scholars build up their phenomenologies of religion.*[31]

If one changes this last sentence to: "it is on the this basis that scholars partly build up their phenomenologies of religion," then the differences between the historical-critical and the phenomenological approaches come into view. The phenomenology of religion goes beyond the historical-critical method in its search for patterns and structure as it looks for these *more* exclusively, *more* comprehensively and *more* single-mindedly than is usually the case with the historical-comparative method. It is a difference both of degree, and of differences in degree leading to differences in kind. In this sense the *goals* of the phenomenology of religion in general, and of the phenomenology of religion of a particular datum of a specific religious tradition in particular, coincide, but their *methods* differ. In the case of the former the goal is achieved by placing a particular item in a broader comparative context, through a "wide angle" approach, one might say. In the case of the latter the goal is achieved by letting the particular datum reveal its pattern in splendid isolation as it were, through a "zoom lens" approach, if you will.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 572.
31 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

CHAPTER VI

The Phenomenology of Religion as a Phenomenology of Families of Religions

I

The phenomenology of religion, in its broadest connotation, constitutes an approach to the study of religion. One such approach is represented by the work of J. G. Arapura, which bears the title *Religion as Anxiety and Tranquillity*, and the subtitle *An Essay in Comparative Phenomenology of the Spirit.*[1]

The approach adopted by J. G. Arapura is a distinct one, within the broad realm of the phenomenology of religion. In order to identify its uniqueness it is helpful to follow a fourfold classification made by Douglas Allen, within which he places scholars who employ the term. It will then become apparent that, as such, J. G. Arapura's approach does not fall specifically within any of the four categories. In the first category, according to Allen, "one notes a proliferation of works in which *phenomenology of religion* is used in the vaguest, broadest, and most uncritical of ways. Often the term seems to mean nothing more than an investigation of the phenomena of religion."[2]

This is really a very broad category and the undiscriminating could lump all of the three succeeding categories into this one, thereby creating the proliferation required to fall into it. Moreover, different scholars might, in the light of their own preferences, discard the approaches adopted within the phenomenology of religion into

1 J. G. Arapura, *Religion as Anxiety and Tranquillity: An Essay in the Comparative Phenomenology of the Spirit* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1972).
2 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, p. 273.

this bin.[3] It might, therefore, be wiser to pass on to a consideration of the next category which Allen sees as extending "[f]rom the Dutch scholar P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye to such contemporary scholars as the Scandinavian historians of religions Geo Widengren and Åke Hultkrantz." For them "the phenomenology of religion has meant the comparative study and the classification of different types of religious phenomena. There has been little if any regard for specific phenomenological concepts, methods, or procedures of verification."[4]

Arapura's work bears some, but minimal resemblance to this approach as in a sense his work does involve "the classification of different types of religious phenomena," except that the religious phenomena he classifies are of a very different type from those which belong to this classification. He is in fact closer to the third group, which includes "numerous scholars, such as W. Brede Kristenseu, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, C. Jouco Bleeker, Mircea Eliade, and Jacques Waardenburg, [who] have identified the phenomenology of religion as a specific branch, discipline, or method within *Religionswissenschaft*. This is where the most significant contributions of the phenomenology of religion to the study of religion have been made."[5]

Arapura, however, takes special pains to distinguish his work from that of Eliade. He recognises "the obvious similarities between Eliade's scheme" and his own but also notes several differences between the two.[6]

The relationship of the work of Arapura to the fourth category is more involved, especially as this category seems to embrace three sub-categories: (1) "a few scholars such as Max Scheler and Paul Ricoeur, [who] have explicitly identified much of their approaches with philosophical phenomenology;" (2) "others such as Rudolf Otto, van der Leeuw, and Eliade, [who] who have used a phenomenological method and have been influenced, at least partially,

[3] Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 248.
[4] Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 273.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] J. G. Arapura, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–55.

by phenomenological philosophy;" and (3) those scholars who represent "numerous influential theological approaches from the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher to those of Paul Tillich and many contemporary theologians (such as Edward Farley) that have utilized a phenomenology of religion as a preliminary stage in the formulation of theology." Of those three sub-categories Arapura's work seems to bear out some connection with (2); he in fact discusses the three scholars mentioned there specifically as representing 'some phenomenological theories of religion.'[7]

II

Now that the broad context of Arapura's work has been provided one may move to the text: to what he has to say.

The basic accomplishment of Arapura is to distinguish between two types of religion or rather religiosities. The significance of his work springs from the fact that scholars before him have either dealt with individual religious traditions in this context, or with religion itself as a generic category.[8] Arapura is working at a level intermediate between the two. He rises above the individual traditions which lie at the base of the pyramid, as it were. He, however, does not move right up to the top of the pyramid either, where all the religions are reduced to the vanishing point of religion. He works neither at the bottom nor at the top but somewhere in the middle, and this is what is fascinating for the student of religion. What makes his enterprise even more fascinating in the eyes of such a student is the fact that this intermediate level has been explored more often in the history of religion, as distinguished from the phenomenology of religion. The distinction sometimes drawn between the Semitic and the Indic Religious Tradition[9] (a distinction which in my view should really be drawn between the Semitic, the Indic *and* the Sinic Religious Tradi-

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 42–57.
[8] Edward J. Jurji, *The Phenomenology of Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 193.
[9] R. C. Zaehner, ed., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 15–19.

tions) is an obvious example but still worth mentioning. I am not aware of any such distinctions being proposed in the *phenomenology* of religion, which explains the choice of topic of this essay.

III

Arapura's construction of two types of phenomenologies of the spirit can be looked upon as consisting of three components: (1) a phenomenological component; (2) a historical component; and (3) a contemporary or dialogical component.

The phenomenological component relies on a key distinction between what he calls a first order and a second order reflection, leading to the identification of the Absent, with a capital A. The consciousness of the Absent, as viewed through the history of religions, leads him to take three steps: (1) to identify the notion of a type; (2) to identify two types; and (3) to point out the distinction between the two types. If the two types, then, are accepted as representing existing realities then the question arises: How do they relate to each other? The attempt to answer this question provides the third constituent of his scheme – the dialogical.

The Phenomenological Component

J. G. Arapura begins by taking his cue from Husserl, who emphasises the centrality of the element of consciousness in perception. Husserl insisted, however, that this consciousness is consciousness *of something*; that is to say, it is intentional. Thus he wrote:

> We busy ourselves ... with the essential nature of *consciousness of something* following, for instance, our consciousness of the existence of material things, living bodies and men, or of technical and literary works and so forth.[10]

Arapura, however, observes that "nowhere does he appear to make consciousness as it reflects upon itself as the subject of further reflection."[11] Arapura proceeds to do just that. He observes in the light of this discovery:

[10] See J. G. Arapura, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[11] *Ibid.*

> Thus, two very important truths present themselves to us: (1) There is a first-order reflection, a spontaneous activity of consciousness directed towards itself as well as a second-order reflection, a methodological activity of consciousness initiated by the thinker. (2) These two orders are connected, which is a fact that the methodological thinker must always bring to greater clarity. In the light of these truths it may be concluded that while it is quite legitimate for phenomenology to make consciousness as it apprehends everything in the world – all phenomena – as a prerequisite for the study of everything, it is obligated to itself to reflect also on consciousness as it reflects upon itself, or, so to say, involuntarily tries to apprehend itself and thereby confront existence.[12]

After adding that this is a step of which Heidegger might approve, he goes on to say:

> Our hope is that by elucidating the concept of the first-order reflection of consciousness upon itself and by subjecting it to the second-order (methodological) reflection a rather novel possibility for the study of religion will be unfolded, which will be different from what phenomenologists of religion have hitherto developed. Accordingly, we seek to locate religion in the particular self-activity of consciousness, which stands out, with no intent, however, to exclude other elements of consciousness pointed to by thinkers, like Rudolf Otto which have also their places in the manifestation of religions.[13]

Arapura thus sets up two tasks for himself: (1) an elucidation of the concept of the first order reflection and (2) its subjection to the second order reflection. The elucidation consists of realising that while Husserl also allowed for a phenomenology of religion, he did so only on the condition that "disconnection with nature" be achieved concomitantly. Arapura argues that while the

> legitimacy of this demand musr be granted, as far as religion is concerned the disconnection must be pushed one step further back, because it, unlike state, moral custom and law, and even more drastically, unlike the varieties of cultural expressions, is more internal to the self and hence must be predicated upon consciousness' reflection upon itself. A certain character of consciousness will be revealed as plenary to the

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[13] *Ibid.*

coming into being of the 'phenomenon' of religion and perhaps also, by one step removed, to the manifestation of other 'natural realities' like state, moral custom and law. This character does not conflict with other elements of consciousness like the numinous sense, feeling of dependence and ultimate concern which are pointed out by different thinkers as the source of religion, but, on the contrary, will feed into them and be integrated with them. It will be seen to be universal and pervasive, resident in the self-activity of consciousness.[14]

Consciousness perceives existence and then a self-confrontation of existence takes place in consciousness's reflection upon itself. *This reveals a sense of wrongness of existence.* However, "the sense of wrongness of existence is not to be understood as an ordinary discontent that can be removed by some special argument or analysis or knowledge, although quests in that direction are automatically launched from this ground. It should be assumed that it is as fundamental as wonder and curiosity which are regarded respectively as the sources of philosophy and science."[15] It should also be carefully noted that

> [c]onsciousness' reflection upon itself is to be regarded as neither adventitious nor optional but essential, and instances of consciousness totally free of it and hence devoid of the sense of wrongness have never been encountered in actual life, and if it has to exist it has to be invented. The degree of variation in intensity in self-reflection among individuals is in itself immaterial, self-reflection being ultimately a universal, social fact, operating as a social fact exactly in the manner of myth, ritual and symbolism, which are incidentally themselves used as vehicles for its self-expression. In this respect every individual instance of self-awareness and the social immanent general self-awareness reinforce each other. And such denials of the sense of wrongness as a fact that are sometimes made, for instance by some naturalists, pragmatists and positivists, are unquestionably the result of philosophical attitudes formed in a spirit of defiance and consequently are to be treated as implicit answers to the fact already apprehended a priori but not admitted to.[16]

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 62.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

It must be recognised at this stage that

> [t]here cannot, however, be a complete phenomenology of religion based solely upon the fact of consciousness' reflection upon itself and the sense of wrongness. An effort in that direction should be judged as immoderate and antithetical to the demand for an integral theory implicit in the phenomenon itself. Nevertheless, in this approach there is an effort to supply a certain essential element, a vital dynamic, that has been missed out by all other theories including the phenomenological ones.[17]

Arapura goes on to maintain that "the sense of wrongness of existence is always attended by an equally generalized abiding sense of an Absent Reality, often appearing as an Absent divine." This calls for clarification:

> The sense of the wrongness of existence arises, no doubt, against an ontic background, upon which existence is projected as upon a screen. But the interplay of the background and the projection presents only an elusive shadow of which the substance would for ever seem to be there by being not there, that is to say, by appearing that it ought to exist on one consideration but absolutely cannot on another. The shadow is a cosmos-sized one, nay larger than the cosmos, which it encloses, and simply presents an image the interior of which is thoroughly blotted out. What the image itself does is to provide an outline to mark the absence of Reality.[18]

The phenomenology of the Absent is not the same as the mysticism of the *via negativa* or the theology of the Absent – the Death of God. Similarly, the "purely ontological aspect of the question must be excluded" even as we recognise that Heidegger has dealt with it.

> It must now be clarified how 'The spheres of the spirit' emerge. This emergence is not a discovery that has come about as the result of some metaphysical inquiry, which we totally by-passed, but of a very much more modest epistemological activity. There are many pointers to the existence of such spheres, which are what we start with in the same

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

sense that in any compatative study of religion the awareness that different religions have different modes of existence is not the end product of one's search but rather the reason for beginning it. The objective of the study is to explore, briefly or extensively as the case may be, the horizons of the difference and also to ascertain if a mutual encompassing could be brought about.[19]

The Historical Component

Arapura then proceeds to relate these spheres of the spirit to "types," guardedly accepting Paul Tillich's definition that types "are logical ideals for the sake of discerning understanding."[20] Arapura next identifies two types, while conceding the possibility that other types could be identified as well. The two types he identifies he calls the Anxiety Type and the Tranquillity Type:

> The words 'anxiety' and 'tranquillity' are here used to represent the two different types of consciousness expressed in two separate spheres of the spirit. In both cases the ultimate religious sources of insight have been decisive in shaping the consciousness. When we pass from the primeval forms of religion to the historical religions of revelation great events and great images loom large over the horizon, irrespective of whether such passage constitutes progress or regress. The sense of the wrongness of existence continues to call for symbolic and ritual structures of rectification, no doubt, but also call for much more: for radical new beginnings, what Walter Otto describes as renewal from the very roots.
>
> Anxiety can be detected as a fundamental element in Western spirituality, and indisputably it has its sources in Christianity itself as the Pauline writings above all will abundantly testify. It is related to the particular understanding of the cause of the world's predicament, but also to the end to which history moves. As St. Paul writes, 'for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travelleth in pain together until now. And not only *they* but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit* the redemption of our body'. The Christian expression of the spiritual life is definitely related to the *eschaton* and to its delay, to the expectation, anguish *and* relief involved in them. The particular expression of Christianity-determined Western consciousness is inalienable from this source.[21]

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

Arapura goes on to offer a similar account of 'tranquility'. He writes:

> In the Indian spiritual sphere determined by the Veda, Vedanta and Buddhism, whereas anxiety has always been recognized as the source of all human striving, most of all in religion, Reality begins where anxiety is terminated. It has been the belief that anxiety itself is the denial of Reality, since it is the character of the phenomenal world of becoming, to be both contained within its bounds, false as they are, and eventually burnt up along with that world. Anxiety must be totally forbidden to distort and pervert man's perception of Reality, which can mediate itself only in modes of tranquility.[22]

He clarifies the point further as follows:

> Now, obviously we cannot contend that all Indian religious and philosophical systems have the same view of Reality, for indeed the differences are vast. However, it is evident that the differences obtain at the metaphysical level or with reference to metaphysical questions, but by taking recourse to that possibility, achieved by modern phenomenological thought, of thinking ontology at the purely existential level, a divorce from questions of the former kind can be accomplished. In terms of existential ontology a reduction of otherwise diverse forms of Indian religious and philosophical traditions would seem possible. We can speak without exaggeration or distortion of what is common to Buddhism, Jainism and the various systems of Hindu religion. To put it simply, it concerns a state of being, of abiding, which transcends the anxiety-laden world of becoming. And that state is tranquillity. The Upaniṣadic seers, the Vedanta teachers, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the Buddha and Mahāvīra are all basically agreed on this.[23]

He then draws, in my count, six points of contrast between the two which must be presented in bold strokes, within the limits of the space we have allowed ourselves for the purpose: (1) re ontology, for the Anxiety Type, anxiety possesses the greatest ontological gravity and dignity while for the Tranquillity Type the same status belongs to tranquillity; (2) re epistemology, the Tranquillity Type represents a circle: Absolute Reality-Illusion (the World) – Absolute Reality. For the Anxiety Type "the significance of the circle consists in its

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[23] *Ibid.*

never being completed ... the world is frightening real and cannot be subtracted from reality;" (3) re doxology, for the Anxiety Type the universe possesses a gratuitous givenness; for the Tranquillity Type it is a fortuitous occurrence; (4) re existence, orientations towards the Absent differ and even the statement that God does not exist has to be interpreted differently; (5) re ethics, the Anxiety Type involves concepts of conscience and guilt and a conscience about conscience. The Tranquillity Type is free of such concerns; (6) re history, the manifestation of anxiety through conscience and guilt has led to the typical Western-Christian notion of history, while the Indian counterpart of history is *dharma*, which integrates moral life with the inwardness of tranquillity.

The Dialogical Component

It should be clear by now that Arapura has

> set up (1) something subtler and more hidden than religion, namely, a universal sense of the wrongness of existence, which (in conjunction with other more specific senses such as enunciated severally by great observers of the phenomena of religion like Schleiermacher and Otto) prepares the way for the manifestation of religion; (2) something wider and no less concrete than the religions, namely, the spheres of the spirit, which by their very nature are a step removed from conscious self-estimation as religions, which we should, however, prefer to treat as extensions of the religions or the families of religions. Even so, these spheres of the spirit will be tethered in our scheme to the religions or families of religions which alone constitute their self-identifying and self-preserving nuclei.[24]

Moreover, his engagement of the spirit is non-Hegelian in character.[25]

The question which now remains to be answered is: How are these two spheres to be related to each other?

Arapura identifies two previous models which may be applied to the current analysis and then proposes his own. One model he examines is the Toynbeean model, named after Arnold Toynbee, the

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

famous historian. According to this model what eventually happens is that the Tranquillity Type assimilates the Anxiety Type. This is how one might interpret one of his well-known statements that the present age, which had a European beginning, may have an Indian ending. Arapura rejects this model on the ground that "the essences of all religions lie in some revelation which by definition of it would make negotiation of it a forbidden contravention of their nature."[26]

Another model Arapura examines may be called the Buberian model, after Martin Buber and his celebrated explication of the I-Thou relationship. This model would visualise interaction as occurring between individuals belonging to the two spheres of the spirit – the Anxiety Type and the Tranquillity Type. Arapura does not regard this type of dialogue as feasible either. If the Toynbeean Type in a sense is too abstract and assimilative, the Buberian Type is too concrete and individualistic.

> Insofar as the religions themselves cannot undertake dialogue but only individuals who are members of them and "represent" them can, it would be necessary to presuppose that they can grasp, and authoritatively speak for, the whole range of the religions concerned, including most of all the revelatory essences. That would require these individuals to be veritable incarnations of their religions, which surely is beyond the power of human imagination.[27]

Arapura's own suggestion regarding the manner in which such dialogue may occur follows a different course.

> Now if we are prepared to move from religions as such and in their whole range, to what is phenomenologically graspable, namely the forms of consciousness cognate with the religions manifested in the spheres of the spirit, dialogue as thinking them together, without the questionable and problematic involvement of the religions and their representatives, can be more easily conceived. Nay, the religious thinker of the future will find that quite inescapable should he desire to know his own freedom. *Dialogue, therefore must be construed as what takes place between the spheres of the spirit in the sense that a thinker thinks them together.*[28]

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 116, emphasis added.

CHAPTER VII

Towards a Phenomenological Hierarchy of Methods in the Study of Religion

I

"*The scale creates the phenomenon*"[1] is a celebrated aphorism in the study of religion. In this chapter I shall argue that by reversing the aphorism into "*The phenomenon creates the scale*," one can produce equally spectacular results in the field and that these results consist in enabling the formulation of a hierarchy among the methods employed in the study of religion. The aphorism has also been reversed, I discovered subsequently, by William E. Paden[2] to serve a different purpose.

II

The phenomenon of arriving at the understanding of a single religious datum is perhaps the smallest in scale, unless one chose to focus on understanding a single individual member of a tradition. This enterprise is clearly different from the more generic one made famous by Mircea Eliade, when he declared that the "ultimate aim of the historian of religion" was "to understand and to make understandable to others, religious man's behaviour and mental universe;"[3] it is concerned with *a* historian trying to understand *a* tradition through the believers, who are, however, often referred to in the

1 Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), p. 7.
2 William E. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 118.
3 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p. 162.

singular.[4] Among all the scholars Kristensen seems to be the most consistent in his understanding that the goal of the historian is to understand a *particular* religious datum. For him both the phenomenology and the philosophy of religion must subserve this end.[5] And further, that this datum must be understood as the believer understands it, even if this involves only an asymptotic approximation.[6] Some have argued that "to confine oneself *to* the believer's point of view is to treat the believer as the subject not of study but of worship:"[7] this, however, is not the case here, as understanding the believers' viewpoint is not as simplistic as it is made out to be.[8] The idea behind taking the believer's viewpoint into account is not to worship him or her but rather to prevent the reductionistic desecration of his or her worship.

The consideration of religious phenomena of the believers on their own terms is also widespread in social anthropology. It is for this reason, rather than because social anthropology studies small-scale societies,[9] that the historical studies of the type mentioned above can be bracketed together with the anthropological, to establish the first level of hierarchy among methods in the study of religion. These may be called *micro-methods* in the study of religion.

The same *micro-method* level can be identified even when the field of religious studies is approached as one characterised by comparison. The details of the method which may be employed in carrying out such a comparative study have been spelled out by

4 W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 7; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither-And Why?," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 42; Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 228–229.
5 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 12, etc.
6 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7.
7 Robert A Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 23.
8 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 460.
9 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–86; James A. Boon, "Anthropology, Ethnology and Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 1, pp. 308–316.

anthropologists. Such a proposal relevant to the study of religion was developed by Evans-Pritchard. It may be summarized as follows: "we must, for example, first investigate the religion of one Melanesian people, then compare the religion of that group with several other Melanesian societies that are nearest to it in their culture. After that would come a comparative study of all Melanesian groups, and only then could one say something about Melanesian religion in general. This laborious kind of research is the only hope for eventually achieving broader conclusions about religion."[10]

III

The next level of phenomena consists of the identification of typologies of religious traditions themselves. A classic example of this if found in R. C. Zaehner's introduction to *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, wherein he distinguishes clearly between "Western Religion, by which we in fact mean the religion originating in the near east" and which "owes its origin, directly or indirectly to the Jews"[11] on the one hand, and the "Eastern" religion which "either owes its origin to India or is profoundly influenced by Indian religious thought."[12] More recently, it has become conventional to distinguish among three types of major religious traditions: among religions of (1) Biblical (2) Indian and (3) East Asian origin.[13]

Methods employed at these levels may be described as *meso-methods* and can be identified not only in historical but phenomenological and anthropological studies as well. Kristensen explains that "[p]henomenology does not try to compare the religions with one another as large units, but it takes out of their historical setting the similar facts and phenomena which it encounters in different religions, brings them together, and studies them in groups.

10 William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds., *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach* (Evanston, Ill. and Elmsford, N.Y.: Row, Peterson and Company, 1958), p. 5.

11 R. C. Zaehner, ed., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 16.

12 *Ibid.*

13 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–83.

The corresponding data, which are sometimes nearly identical, bring us almost automatically to comparative study. The purpose of such study is to become acquainted with the religious thought, idea or need which underlies the group of corresponding data."[14] He proceeds to illustrate the operation of this meso-method with examples of sacrifices, prayer, ritual purification, etc.[15] This phenomenological approach of Kristensen as well as of G. van der Leeuw, must be carefully distinguished from the history of religions method which is a mega-level method.

The distinction is important. As Katherine K. Young explains:

> ... because phenomenology allowed for a focus on direct experience, it created scope for scholars to appreciate claims of religious experience by individuals ... the exercise of *epoche* was specially valuable, because it precluded worry over the existence of deities, the truth claims of cosmogonic myths, or the efficaciousness of magic so that phenomenologists of religion could observe, describe and interpret phenomena like these – first from emic perspectives (those of insiders) and subsequently from etic ones (those of outsiders) by inductively determining a yet more complex pattern based on *all* emic perspectives.[16]

What is being proposed here is the recognition of a distinction between (1) "emic perspectives" and (2) "a more complex pattern based on *all* emic perspectives." The same distinction is implicit in the following description of the phenomenological procedure, again by Katherine K. Young:

> Phenomenologists move from their own specific and concrete experiences to those of others by way of comparison. That way, they can determine whether any concrete particulars are experienced in common. They become more confident, of course, when the latter are reported – despite the epistemological gap between self and other. And when this occurs often enough, there is an empirical basis for declaring that a pattern exists. In that case, there has been a passage from the particular to the general.

14 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

15 *Ibid.*, Chapter 27, etc.

16 Katherine K.Young, "Women's Studies and the Phenomenology of Religion," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women's Studies*, p. 43.

For some phenomenologists, patterns consist of objective, in the sense of invariable, features. For other phenomenologists, patterns consist of common features suggestive of probabilities. They also call these patterns "essences" but view them as a "family of resemblances" rather than a set of invariable features.[17]

She then goes on to say: "The latter version of the phenomenological method is used by scholars of the *Religionswissenschaft* school ... ."[18] It is this distinction which enables us to distinguish between the meso- and mega-levels in the present context.

The following methodology of G. van der Leeuw is a good illustration of phenomenology at the meso-level:

... the phenomenology of religion must in the first place assign names: sacrifice, prayer, saviour, myth, *etc.* In this way it appeals to appearances. Secondly, it must interpolate these appearances within its own life and experience them systematically. And in the third place, it must withdraw to one side, and endeavour to observe what appears while adopting the attitude of intellectual suspense. Fourthly, it attempts to clarify what it has seen, and again (combining all its previous activities) try to comprehend what has appeared. Finally, it must confront chaotic "reality", and its still uninterpreted signs, and ultimately testify to what it has understood. Nevertheless all sorts of problems that must be highly interesting in themselves must thereby be excluded. Thus phenomenology knows nothing of any historical "development" of religion, still less of an "origin" of religion. Its perpetual task is to free itself from every non-phenomenological standpoint and to retain its own liberty, while it conserves the inestimable value of this position always anew.[19]

The anthropological method, similarly at the *meso-level*, must only "make comparisons within a continent" or "between continents and nations" but *not* "on a random or global scale," a distinction Lessa and Vogt do *not* make, and speak of the two in the same breath.[20] This distinction between the "continental" and the "global" is as vital here as between phenomenology and the History of Religions method made above. It is now time to clarify this distinction.

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
18 *Ibid.*
19 G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, p. 688.
20 William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 4.

IV

The crux of the matter lies in the realisation that although the "comparative method" (which is itself comparable here with the History of Religions method, given the fluidity of these terms) "builds a context for interpreting religious life, providing an educated, resonant matrix of associations and patternings that has itself been derived from a study of the different traditions" in consonance with the believers' point of view, it is at the same time the "task of the comparative perspective – to look beyond the private claims of all particular religions and see the whole set in terms of continuities and differences."[21] It is in aiming at this goal that the historical method now passes beyond the meso-method into the macro-method, when it can transcend the self-understanding of the tradition as of the family-tree of which it may be a part. It is also in aiming at this goal that the phenomenological method goes beyond itself to become the History of Religions method. No sooner does Eliade cross this invisible line that Ugo Bianchi notices a departure has occurred:

... we must remark – apart from other specific considerations of this example – that historical typology casts a doubt over one of the most alluring but dangerous hypotheses put forward by Eliade: that is that the symbols, hierophanies and archetypes may have a kind of life of their own and in themselves, a fulness of meaning which runs through all history, *even transcending the awareness their respective believers have of these archetypes.* [22]

This indeed is the characteristic of the macro-level, that the self-understanding of the believers is transcended. The sociological and psychological methods of the stndy of religion also belong here because they too disregard the believers' self-understanding, though in a manner considered more transgressive of the insider's perspective than the History of Religions approach.

The following passage provides a good basis for reviewing the discussion up to this point: "The enactment of the Sacrifice of Christ

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21 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
22 Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), p. 188, emphasis added.

may have a sociological or even psychological meaning, but it also has a participatory, religious meaning for the believer – a religious as well as a social function. It may consolidate group feelings, but it also imprints and transforms the group feelings with supernatural images. One of the great functions of ritual is to enact the content of religious or mythic truths."[23]

It illustrates how the various so-called reductive explanations, the sociological and the psychological, may not be mutually exclusive,[24] nor need they exclude a non-reductive phenomenological explanation as provided here in terms of sacrifice. However, some of the interpretations provided hy Eliade in archetypal terms clearly present difficulties[25] and to that extent the History of Religions method here represents the macro-level.

The source of this difficulty is twofold: that Eliade's understanding of a phenomenon may contain elements which exceed the self-understanding of the believers and that because, according to Eliade, a symbol may be acting at a subconscious or transconscious level, it may not either be available for verification or may only be available for verification but not falsification.

The example also illustrates that methodology in the study of religion is a layered entity: the Eucharist experience here provides an example of a multiplex and complex interacting methodological matrices: historical (micro-level), phenomenological (meso-level), as well as sociological and psychological (macro-level).

V

The final level, the mega-level, is represented by the hermeneutical and philosophical methods. The word hermeneutical is being here used in a special sense. If each of the approaches discussed earlier uses a "different interpretive lense" (indeed it is the size of these lenses which we have tried to determine in this chapter), and "every

23 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
25 Ugo Bianchi, *op. cit.*, p. 188; J. G. Arapura, *Religion in Anxiety and Tranquillity* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1972), pp. 42–55.

interpretation is contextual," then "understanding contextuality is the ultimate, clarifying step"[26] in the process. By hermeneutics we mean here this kind of contextuality.

This point is important. Hermeneutics is critically concerned with the meaning and interpretation of a *text*. The understanding of a text presupposes a context and one can thus distinguish between two kinds of hermeneutics – one which primarily focuses on the *text* and one which focuses primarily on the *context*, without implying that one is not important for the understanding of the other. A shift in focus from textuality to contextuality however is worth recognising, just as the fields of microeconomics and macroeconomics within economics involve a different kind of theorising within the broader field of economics. Another way of advancing the point would be to look upon a "text" as consisting of (1) the text; (2) its meaning; and (3) the value it inscribes. A consideration of this third element would again lift the hermeneutical exercise to a macro-level.

However, understanding contextuality cannot be a substitute for veracity. In the case of each of the methods discussed earlier, the truth question was bypassed one way or another. In terms of the historical method the truth-question was bracketed in relation to the believer; in anthropology it was at most studied in relation to rationality, not truth; in the case of phenomenology again one practised epoché; and while sociology and psychology and History of Religions may lay claim to their own "truths," Truth with a capital T was not engaged. So far as the sociology of religion is concerned, if society can be a way of interpreting religion, "religion itself can be a way of interpreting society."[27] As for the psychology of religion, religion is "as real as the psychological realities it represents"[28] and there is no way of getting out of our psyches. In the hands of the History of Religions method, religious beliefs are "seen as expressions of someone's worldview rather than propositions to be argued in terms of their independent truth."[29]

26 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p.110.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
29 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

The philosophical and hermeneutical methods thus stand out as *mega-methods*. The eminent philosopher of religion, John Hick, in his recent Gifford Lectures,[30] has argued for the rationality as well as the reality of religion,[31] but he has elsewhere argued for a consideration of its reality,[32] for good reasons. This if we relate religion with ultimate truth. If we choose to relate religion with ultimate meaning rather than truth, then the hermeneutical method pulls up neck-and-neck, both the methods now representing two aspects of ultimate concern.

Snch in brief is one outcome of the application of the phenomenological method to the phenomenon of methodology in the study of religion itself!

VI

The operation of the phenomenology of religion itself could also be examined at each of the four levels identified above.

Micro-Level

Verstehen or "understanding" is an endeavour central to the phenomenology of religion, a concern so pervasive that it often remains unarticulated. This attempt to achieve understanding possesses several facets. There is, to begin with, the distinction between an "historical" and an "empirical" understanding, using the two expressions in a special way about to be clarified. I use the expression "historical" understanding to mean the significance of a given "fact" in the study of religion in terms of the light historical research sheds on the issue, when the fact itself may belong to the realm of myth or ritual. Similarly, I use the word "empirical" understanding to mean what any given "fact" – be it text, an artifact or an archeological remain, or mythical or ritual event, etc. – means for the insider, as

30 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989).

31 Robert A. Segal, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–75.

32 John Hick, *The Philosophy of Religion* (third edition) (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1983), pp. 113–121.

distinguished from the outsider. It is obvious that a distinction between the religions of the past, or even religions in the past, and religions in the present comes into play. Thus we might wish to know what a scriptural passage meant to the people who heard it or wrote it for the first time, as distinguished from what the passage means to people when they hear it now. One might also wish to know what a certain religious fact means to a person who belongs to a religious tradition at the present moment in time, as distinguished from how it might be understood by a person who does not belong to that religious tradition. The overcoming of epistemic distance both in terms of "time" and "space" is involved, as it were.

These remarks prepare the ground for offering a phenomenological perspective on some items of religious data at the micro-level.

The myth of Prometheus, from Greek mythology, is widely known.[33] An incident therein, involving a battle of wits between Zeus and Prometheus, is also well-known: "Prometheus divides an ox into two parts, one of which Zeus is to choose; one part hides the bones under an appetizing layer of fat, while the other part hides the meat under the unappetizing layer of the animal's stomach. Zeus fulfills Prometheus's expectation of choosing for himself the heap of bones."[34]

We have here a detail from a myth. It is used to explain why the "bones" – the relatively unattractive part of the offering – is offered to the gods, who clearly deserve better. Thus the "well-known myth of Prometheus dividing the sacrificial animal, tricking the gods into choosing the worthless part, seems to be trying to explain an anomaly: why are the bones reserved for the gods and the meat for the people?"[35]

How are we to *understand* this piece of religious datum?

One may begin by recapitulating some myths which will ultimately shed light on the issue. According to a Scandinavian myth, "Thor stays at the home of a farmer and kills one of his male goats, but impresses on the partakers of the meal that they should not

33 Klaus-Peter Koepping, "Prometheus," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 12, pp. 4–5.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion: A Historical Approach*, trans. Kees W. Bolle (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), pp. 198–199.

fracture the bones to get at the marrow. The next morning Thor lays the bones on the goat-skin, swings his hammer over them, and the goat is restored to life. But one leg is lame; the farmer's son was unable to resist splitting a bone with his knife."[36] There is an Alpine saga along similar lines: "on certain nights of the year, monntain spirits visit the herds of the farmers and kill one animal, which is eaten in a common meal, and by a rite similar to Thor's they revive the animal the next morning."[37]

It is obvious that these myths "correspond to a procedure in which bones and skin were carefully collected so that the sacrificial animal could be restored to life ... Why?"[38]

If phenomenology of religion seeks to "understand" then how is one to make sense of such a ritual procedure? Just when we are groping in the darkness

> [a]n unexpected light is shed on it by the customs of a very ancient culture – even more ancient than that of the primitive cultivators: the primal hunting culture. The hunters of that early culture lived on game and had no scruples about killing animals. Their main concern was the abundance of game. A strict ritual was observed in the slaying and eating of the game; after the meal the bones were laid out on the skin in the design of the skeleton, in the expectation that the "Master of Animals" would restore it to life and thus maintain the animal stock.[39]

We are now in a position to understand the mythic detail involving Zeus being tricked into receiving the bones.

> ... The Greeks did not understand why the gods were given the worthless parts of the sacrificial animal, so they made up the myth of Prometheus. If we think of the ritual of the ancient hunters, however, the apportionment of the Greek animal sacrifice is at once clear. The meat and the good parts went to men, but the bones and the skin were carefully kept for the "Lord of Animals." It seems that the Olympic gods were given the poorest share; but the more archaic idea was that the power of life was present in those hard and indestructible bones.[40]

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 206.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 206–207.
[40] *Ibid.*

Here, then, we have an illustration of arriving at a phenomenological understanding of a piece of historical datum. The question arises: Why should the understanding just gained not be called an "historical understanding" rather than a "phenomenological understanding"? Indeed it could also be so described, and this accounts for the frequent hyphenation of the historical-phenomenological method. We would do well, however, to focus on the typically "phenomenological" elements of the understanding arrived at: (1) it was reached by comparing *several* mythical accounts; (2) it was reached by comparing several mythical accounts spread across vast stretches of time and space, which were "abstracted" from their specific settings to yield an insight of a general order; and (3) the drive to "understand" was crucially phenomenological, for while a historian may continue to record what he or she does not "understand," the *raison d'être* of the phenomenology of religion consists of this attempt to "understand" *per se*.

This was an example of a historical-phenomenological understanding arrived at through the phenomenological method. Our next move, from mythical to textual material, may appear seamless but it conceals an important development. Max Müller and the founders of the science of religion were interested in evolving a "science of mythology" so as to impart to the study of religion the dignity of a "natural science."[41] Natural science, however, emphasises explanation (*Erklärung*) whereas the work actually being carried out as part of the "scientific endeavour" belonged as much to the cultural sciences, which emphasise understanding (*Verstehen*).

The distinction has to do with the fact that the data with which the natural sciences work consist of inanimate objects, while the data of the cultural sciences consists of human beings. Thus natural objects can be "understood" directly, without the need to engage their own "self-understanding." Cultural sciences cannot bypass the self-understanding of their own objects of study – human beings – in the way the natural sciences can. Hence the need for understanding understanding.

This use of this distinction of Dilthey in the present context helps explain the emergence of the phenomenological perspective even as

[41] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 40ff.

we pursue it. "The distinctive method of the cultural sciences is understanding (*Verstehen*), whereas that of the natural sciences is explanation (*Erklärung*). The natural scientist explains events by employing universal laws, whereas the historian neither discovers nor employs such laws, but, rather, seeks to understand the actions of agents by discovering their intentions, purposes, wishes, and character traits. Such action is intelligible because human actions, in contrast to natural events, have an 'inside' that we can understand because we too are persons. Understanding, then is the discovery of the 'I' in the 'Thou,' and it is possible because of a shared universal human nature."[42]

In the examples that follow, the phenomenological method is applied to the text of three biblical passages, in the context of trying to "understand" what they meant to the original auditors, *as distinguished from what they mean to a present-day audience*. The passages involved are the following:

(1) Acts 4:12:	*... for there is no other name under heaven given among human beings, whereby we must be saved.*
(2) John 14:6:	*... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through me.*
(3) Matthew 28:19:	*... Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*[43]

Each of these has been used as a proof-text of Christian evangelism. Professor Krister Stendahl has argued, however, that they did *not* carry the same implication for the original auditors of these passages.

Re Acts 4:12: Professor Stendahl points out that the statement is made by Peter, by way of answering to the accusation that "Peter had performed the miracle of a magician in his own name." He "answers by the exclamation: 'Heavens no, in no other name is there salvation but Jesus'. This does not relate to the problem of Christianity and Buddhism – at least not on the conscious level,"[44] and

[42] Van A. Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

[43] Krister Stendahl, "From God's Perspective We Are All Minorities," *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 2 (1993), p. 3.

[44] *Ibid.*

certainly not to the consciousness of Peter at the time. "But words like that grow legs and walk out of their context,"[45] to become proof texts of evangelism.

Re John 14:6: This "passage is found in the beginning of what is called the farewell speech of Jesus. The setting is this: 'Do not be upset in your hearts, believe in God, believe also in me. I'm going to leave you, but in this world there are many ways – many ways – for you to stay. If there were not I would take you with me right now, but you can stay here. Don't worry... And you know the way to where I am going.' Then Thomas asks: 'But we don't know where you are going. How can we then know the way?' Thomas is always pretty smart, good questions, good logic. Jesus said to him: 'I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through me.'"[46]

[45] *Ibid.* He goes on to add (*ibid.*, pp. 3–4): "And even when that is legitimate we must also remind ourselves of the very nature of confessional language. As Eastern Christianity has always known better than the West, confessional language is doxological. It is a way of praising God. It is the primary language of faith. The home language of the Church is the language of prayer, worship and doxology, giving praise out of the fullness of one's heart. Actually, confessional and liturgical and doxological language is a kind of caressing language by which we express our devotion with abandon and joy. Raymond Brown, the outstanding Roman Catholic exegete, in writing about the development of Biblical studies in the Roman Catholic Church, hails Pius the XII's encyclical of 1943, long before Vatican II, as the milestone in setting Biblical scholarship free in Catholic studies. This the encyclical did when it admitted or even hailed the fact that in studying scriptures you have to study the genre, the style, the nature of the language it has, so that you don't read it in the wrong key. I think this is apropos to Acts 4:12. I can preach wonderful sermons on this but I have to restrict myself."

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 4. He goes on to add: "It strikes me very odd to take a passage from the most intimate and tender conversation with the most intimate and closest circle of disciples, from a context in which their hearts are full of foreboding with the imminent fear of relations about to be severed, to lift a word from *that* conversation, and use it in answering the question of Christianity's relation to other religions. It is just not apropos. It is odd that one of the few passages that are used by those who have closed the doors on a theology of religions in Christianity, should be a passage which is dealing not with the question of the periphery or the margins or exclusion but which, on the contrary, lies at the very heart of the mystery of what came to be the Trinity: the relation between the Father and the Son."

In other words, the passage reassures the followers that the way to God is open to them also because Jesus leads the way, as it were. There is no call to proselytise here *because* Jesus is the "only" way, although one can see how, in a different context, such a meaning could be drawn from it.

Re Matthew 28:19: Professor Stendahl argues that Matthew's gospel concentrates on the role of Jesus for the Jews, as it is a "gospel totally built on the theory that during the ministry of Jesus, neither Jesus nor the disciples were to move outside Israel."[47] It is therefore stunning that towards its end there comes this appeal to go among the Gentile nations. Given this context the question arises: "But what kind of a mission is this? *How did Matthew* – if we start on that level – think of this mission? Did he think of this as a saturation mission ...?"[48] Professor Stendahl answers the question as follows: "I think we can be very clear that Matthew thinks of the mission of the Church on a minority model, as did Paul ... what matters to Paul seems to be establishing a presence ... ."[49]

The passage is clearly missionary. But to understand what is really involved it might be helpful to invoke a distinction drawn by Max Weber between *exemplary* prophecy and *emissary* prophecy.[50] Present-day readers understand the statement routinely as a call to carry on *emissary* missionary activity. What Professor Stendahl seems to be arguing is that, in its *original* context, the passage implies *only* exemplary missionary activity.[51]

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47 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

48 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 439.

51 *Ibid.*, passim. Professor Stendahl writes (*ibid.*, pp. 5–6): "I think we can be very clear that Matthew thinks of the mission of the Church on a minority model, as did Paul. You will remember that in Romans 15 Paul says, 'I have a principle: never run a mission where anybody else has preached the gospel before. And now I have run out of space, there is no place for me to go in the East. So I have to go to Spain, I have to go West.' That's an odd way of looking at things. What matters to Paul seems to be establishing a presence, a small minority in these centers of the East. It is a minority image, it is the establishment, as I like to say, of Laboratory II. Israel was Laboratory I, and when God felt that some good things had been achieved in Laboratory I, God said, 'Lets now try it out on a somewhat broader basis ... on a Gentile basis'; but still a laboratory with Christians as the guinea pigs, Christians as another 'peculiar people.'

The images in the gospel of Matthew are minority images. 'You are the salt of the earth.' Nobody wants the world to be a salt mine. 'You are the light of the world and let your light so shine before the people that they see you good deeds and become Christians.' *That is not what it says.* It says: that they see your good deeds and praise your Father who is in Heaven, have some reason for joy, that's what it says. And think of the magi – the Ayatullahs from Iran. They did not start the church when they got home. We might in retrospect think that was sad; anyway they didn't, and it doesn't seem to bother Matthew. Because for Matthew they got the experience of their life and they had touched the holiness of God's kingdom. Matthew's perspective is centered in what we refer to as the Kingdom."

Our search for "understanding" then leads us to distinguish between what a passage might have meant in its *original* context, from what a passage is taken to mean in the *present* context. Once again "historical" and "phenomenological" understandings are intertwined but this has also now become a threesome, because a "hermeneutical" understanding is also involved. This helps explain why phenomenology of religion, on the one hand, finds itself in close embrace with the historical method, and, on the other, is also caught, on occasion, in an equally close embrace with the hermeneutical method, thereby ultimately leading to such questions as whether Mircea Eliade is a phenomenologist of religion or a hermeneut.

The point may be clarified, and even enlarged, by identifying the two poles of understanding involved in the phenomenological procedure – that of subject and object. To the extent that phenomenology of religion claims the status of, or at least aspires for the status of, objectivity (despite the fact that its *subjects* are conscious human beings and not inert objects), it tilts towards history and "anthropology," for it claims to accurately present the beliefs and practices of the religious communities it studies – whether in their past or their present. These are treated as *empirical* facts even though they are not, in a sense *physical* facts, in the sense the expression is used in the natural sciences. However, to the extent that its subjects are human beings and to the extent that their religion constitutes an interpretation of the world and of their place in it, it must also hermeneutically engage the subjective pole.

Sometimes scholars distinguish between two forms of phenomenology of religion: between a scientific phenomenology of religion and existential phenomenology of religion. This distinction broadly conforms to the two poles identified earlier.[52] Thus when functioning within the sphere of scientific phenomenology of religion, "by making the phenomenal rather than the noumenal our subject matter, we can attain the goal of a philosophy which is scientific in the sense of giving us objective knowledge about something."[53]

This is to be distinguished from an existential phenomenology of religion, whose different motivation[54] was identified earlier under item (8) in section VI of the second chapter.

What is being proposed is that what may be called a hermeneutical phenomenology of religion lies between the two. This form of the phenomenology of religion emerges when

> the question 'What is religion?' is supplemented by the question 'What differences among religious phenomena are most fundamental, and what kinds of classification are most illuminating?' It often turns out that historically distinct traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism and so forth, can be replaced for such purposes by categories that cut across these traditions. Among these categories are Eliade's distinction of cosmos from history, James' distinction of once-born from twice-born and Bergson's distinction of static/closed from dynamic/open.[55]

The gulf which may separate the "original" understanding from the "present" understanding is also illustrated by the biblical injunction to "resist not evil." The doctrine of non-resistance to evil is now considered a lofty moral doctrine, which has influenced the lives of many, ranging from Leo Tolstoy to Mahatma Gandhi – not to mention Jesus Christ himself. It is almost universally treated as an ethical doctrine. It seems, however, that, in Jesus' time it was really, or at least primarily, meant to be understood as an eschatological

52 Merold Westphal, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Edward Craig, General Editor, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), Vol. 7, p. 353.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*

rather than an ethical doctrine. That is to say, the idea was that as the Second Coming was just around the corner, the victim need not take the trouble of resisting evil because divine retribution was so close on hand. The present-day understanding is the consequence of the loss of the sense of the immediacy of the Second Coming, which was so characteristic of the time in which the injunction was uttered. This goes to confirm the statement that

> [t]he study of religious documents cannot prosper unless the historians of religions keep their ideas of man and the universe distinct from their objects of study. There is only one way to do this, not by repressing these ideas and the ideas of their own period, but by making a continuous effort to be aware of them and thus stay alive. Religious documents always contain vital issues and burning questions. The people who study them must also know about vital issues and burning questions in order to see them elsewhere.[56]

This is phenomenologically sound advice, if ever there was.[57]

A contemporary example may be offered as the final illustration in this section. According to the received Islamic tradition, Prophet Muḥammad could not read or write. He was non-literate, as we would put it today. This fact is at best a matter of curiosity or interest for the outsider. To the insider, however, it is a matter of faith, for it indicates that the Prophet did not contaminate the revelation as it came from God with the workings of his own "literacy" – that he did not, in other words, adulterate God's words with his own.

The foregoing discussion enables one to undertake a closer examination of the relationship between the phenomenological and the hermeneutical methods in the study of religion.

It might be helpful to distinguish here between two levels of meaning involved in the use of the term hermeneutics which are not mutually exclusive. Hermeneutics deals with the interpretation of texts but texts can be of mauy kinds. In its primary usage the term text refers to

56 Kees Bolle, Introduction to Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion: A Historical Approach*, trans. Kees Bolle (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1967), p. xviii.

57 See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), Chapter 1, on how one religion plays a hermeneutical role in relation to another.

a literary or scriptural text (a usage later extended to include oral texts). This was and is the focus of hermeneutics. More recently, however, the concept of the text has been extended to such phenomena as ritual performances etc. and further to include life-situations as well. In other words, anything which involves "interpretation" is a text. The relationship of the phenomenological and the hermeneutical methods will therefore have to be examined at both levels. We begin by exploring the relationship in terms of the first level.

One obvious point is provided by the homology between the insider's point of view with "authorial intention."[58] The fact that phenomenology of religion seeks to align itself with the "intentionality" of the insider nudges the two perspectives even closer. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) emphasised the discovery of the intention of the author as foundational to the hermeneutical enterprise. This discovery was to be made combining "an understanding of the cultural and historical context of the author," with "a grasp of the [author's] unique subjectivity ... accomplished only by 'an act of divination' – an intuitive leap by which the interpreter 'relives' the consciousness of the author."[59] This procedure, recommended by Schleiermacher for the hermeneut, is so similar to the procedure recommended for the phenomenologist of religion that the entire passage cited above could be reproduced as the procedure recommended for the phenomenologist by the substitution of a few key words.

The phenomenologist of religion, however, parts company with the hermeneut when the latter stakes the celebrated claim that "Kant can understand Plato better then Plato himself" because Kant knows not only Plato's text, but also knows Plato's context *better* than Plato could ever hope to. This claim, that "the interpreter comes to understand the author better than the author understands himself or herself"[60] places the interpreter in a class by himself, and in a class different from the phenomenologist, who places himself or herself in

[58] Van A. Harvey, "Hermeneutics," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 6, p. 281.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Ibid.*

the context of the believer only to understand the believer better thereby and not to better the self-understanding of the believer.

Schleiermacher proposed not only a general theory of interpretation but a theory of the interpretation of religion as well, wherein he "emphasized" religiosity as an "essential and a priori aspect of human nature."[61] This, of course, is central to phenomenology's understanding of itself, and its connection with phenomenology of religion is quickly established by Van A. Harvey by invoking two key figures in the study of religion, namely, Otto and Eliade. He points out that Schleiermacher's "assumption has elicited many attempts to develop what Paul Ricoeur has called a 'regional hermeneutics': rules governing the interpretation of religious expressions as a unique and autonomous type. One of the earliest and most influential of these attempts was Rudolf Otto's analysis of the 'numinous' in his famous book *Das Heilige* (1917; Eng. trans., *The Idea of Holy*)."[62]

The link with Eliade is more phenomenological than historical, but still very much there.

> Less explicitly indebted to Schleiermacher, but based on the same assumption of the universality of human religiosity, is the very influential work of Mircea Eliade. He argues that the basic structure of religiosity can be seen most clearly in archaic religions in which human life is regarded as part of a living cosmos. Profound connections are said to exist between the rhythms of human and cosmic life. Myths and religious symbols are systems of micro-macrocosmic correspondences and analogies. Human fecundity, for example, is seen as recapitulating the pattern of divine fecundity. All human activities are thus sanctified and made meaningful. This assumption has led Eliade to explore the many variants of certain recurring symbols in the world's religions, as for instance the sacred tree, stones, snakes, fish, and water.[63]

Subsequent developments in hermeneutics were less helpful from a phenomenological perspective. This is specially true of the view which replaced Schleiermacher's emphasis on authorial intention with its virtual abrogation after the 1920s – "that a literary text has its own afterlife independent of the author and that to understand it

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 282.

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *Ibid.*

has little or no relationship to understanding the anthor's intentions when writing it."[64]

There are two reasons why this view by itself is not as subversive of the phenomenological enterprise as might appear at first sight. For one, scholars have repeatedly made a plea for a "dynamic phenomenology"[65] and such an appeal is not entirely at odds with the above view. Moreover, and this is the second reason, some phenomenologists have (although only after issuing the warning that the enterprise may take the practitioner to the very edges of, if not beyond, phenomenology) proposed what might be

> termed "comparative hermeneutics," that is, the comparative study of procedures of interpretation. This too must be understood in a historical perspective. In brief, there seem to be similarities between the ways in which interpreters of religion (theologians, buddhologians, etc.) work. For example, they all have some ways of relating their doctrinal tradition to the present state of humanity. If their methods could be studied systematically, yet phenomenologically, it would give a widely acceptable basis of understanding, not controlled by any particular dogmatic position, yet close to the heartbeat of each religion considered.[66]

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 281.

[65] This appeal for a "dynamic phenomenology of religion" should be distinguished from an appeal to study the "dynamics of religion." Michael Pye refers to an approach which may be "conveniently labelled (following van der Leeuw) 'the dynamics of religion.' Van der Leeuw devoted only a few pages to the subject and C. J. Bleeker also took it up in his volume *The Sacred Bridge*. The point of 'the dynamics of religion' is to see religions not as static doctrinal or symbolic systems but as changing, moving traditions. At this point the preliminary suggestions of the Dutch writers could well be complemented with the perspective of Ernst Troeltsch, who was above all alive to the fact that religions are developing historical traditions moving through changing social contexts. All sophisticated religions experience some degree of tension between the doctrinal norms and formulations which they have inherited and the changing needs of the times" (Michael Pye, "Problem of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1:2–3 (1974), pp. 120–121). A dynamic phenomenology of religion has been proposed by Ninian Smart ("Comparative-Historical Method," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987], Vol. 3, p. 573) and Geo Widengren ("An Introduction to the Phenomenology in Religion," in Walter H. Capps, *Understanding Religion* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972], pp. 149–150).

[66] Michael Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

The problem lies elsewhere. It has to do with the vogue in hermeneutical circles with "new theories of human behaviour in the psychological and social sciences in which human cultural expressions are regarded as manifestations of unconscious and instinctual drives or as reflections of class interests,"[67] or in other words, in the identification of hermeneutics with the hermeneutics of suspicion. The stage is now set for the examination of the relationship between the phenomenological and the hermeneutical methods at the second level. It also has to do with texts, but *after* the interest of the phenomenological philosophy in consciousness has been taken into account. This kind of hermeneutics is now associated with the name of Paul Ricoeur. As Katherine K. Young explains:

> Ricoeur's interest in phenomenology began with his translation of Husserl's *Ideen*. He has both drawn ideas from the movement and been critical of it. For him phenomenology is pre-eminently a method that provides good description. It is not a transcendental idealism as understood by Husserl. Ricoeur has had an abiding interest in Christianity, the mystery of creation, ontology, metaphysics, and the nature of human finitude. Like Christians, he understands human beings in terms of a broken unity, the break creating ambition, hatred, and other destructive passions. He believes that modern human beings are incapable of naively believing in the doctrines of traditional religion or philosophy. On the other hand, he believes that they are by nature open to polysemic myths, symbols, and rituals. Ricoeur makes a hermeneutical "wager" on belief and restoration of the "whole soul." Through the imagination and the "surplus" meaning of literature, the sacred can be discerned. Interpreting literature, albeit with a critical awareness, leads to a new level of meaning. Ricoeur calls it the "second naiveté."[68]

With this in mind the point may be developed as follows:

> [A]n *archaeology* of the decentered subject should stand in tension with a *teleology* of the fulfilled subject, childhood dreams, works of art, and religious symbols, as lived possibilities for a transformed future. In spite of its overdetermined origins, the imagination can activate these possibilities and offer the broken subject new ways of "being in the world."[69]

[67] Van A. Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

[68] Katherine K. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[69] Mark I. Wallis, "Introduction," in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, trans. David Pallauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 7.

Despite the foregoing talk of naiveté, Ricoeur's discussion is far from naive. For while he broadens the concept of what constitutes a text, and even furthers our understanding of the text's meaning as being more of the nature of performances than propositions, he is also alive to the danger that such meaning, as implicit in the world, may also be complicit in the corruption of that world; that is to say that contexts of the texts, and therefore the texts as well, may participate in "structures of domination and ideology" – hence the hermeneutics of suspicion. But such realisation, coupled with the role of wholeness (holiness) of the new individual could also, from a religious point of view, transform the hermeneutics of suspicion into a hermeneutics of compassion. As Katherine K. Young notes:

> Ricoeur refers to the power and numinous nature of the sacred. He maintains that religious beliefs have their own integrity and believes that interpretation should take into account the self-understandings of religious communities. He argues, moreover, that the first step in understanding religions must be to explore them on their own terms, including linguistic ones. He places heavy emphasis on language, in fact, using religious texts to broaden the horizons of individuals. Texts are of two basic types: the oral traditions of primordial societies (which are focused on nature) and the literary ones of the complex societies (focused on history). In short Ricoeur has shifted the focus from the focus on "consciousness" (by the phenomenological philosophers) to texts.[70]

Such an approach places the hermeneutical tradition at odds with the phenomenological in two major ways. Phenomenology of religion is more concerned with the conscious intentionality of the believers, while the kind of hermeneutics just described is more concerned with the operation of unconscious factors. Moreover, such hermeneutics by its very definition is not value-neutral, a position to which the phenomenology of religion remains strongly committed.

Some recent trends, however, raise hopes of convergence between the two. If it is true that in the quest for avoiding "pure subjectivity and arbitrariness," an attempt is being made to rehabilitate a normative approach and it is being argued that "the only compelling

[70] Katherine K. Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–51.

normative principle that has ever been brought forward is the old-fashioned ideal of rightly understanding what the author meant,"[71] then this development is potentially of considerable significance from the point of view of the phenomenology of religion. This development generates the possibility that should the reductionistic studies in religion run the risk of throwing the field open to random subjectivity, the old-fashioned ideal of taking the insider's perspective into account may have to be revived, to inject some measure of normativeness in such a situation.

Meso-level

Much of the conventional phenomenology of religion operates at the meso-level. Take, for instance, Gerardus van der Leeuw's treatment of the theme of "Saviour."[72] When we normally think of a saviour the figure of Jesus Christ comes to mind, followed perhaps by figures of Osiris, Dionysus, etc. In such a context van der Leeuw's treatment of the theme of "Saviour" provides a striking example of the application of the phenomenological method from two points of view: (1) the range of data that is brought to bear on the topic and (2) the operation that is carried out on the data.

We are accustomed to confining our imagination to figures such as Christ, Osiris, Dionysus, etc. when we think of the saviour figure. Van der Leeuw, however, includes the following additional items as *data*, which would not normally cross our mind in thinking of this theme: (1) the *son*; the son "brings salvation. He is not only the hope of the living but the consolation of the dead; and the potency of the family and the tribe is preserved by the son."[73] Not only does van der Leeuw include the son in the category of the "Saviour," he also includes evidence from a "*dead*" religion in support of such inclusion, namely, the Egyptian: "The Egyptians expressed these acts of the good son by the word *nd*, usually translated by 'revenge,' but which means revenge on the father's enemy, Set, as well as all the

[71] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., as cited, *ibid.*, p. 282.
[72] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. I, Chapter II.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

good and the life that the son can bestow on his father: – salvation, therefore, in its most comprehensive sense;"[74] (2) the season of *spring*. One would normally not think of including the season of spring in a discussion of a saviour figure, any more than one would think of the son in this context. Bnt van der Leeuw includes this as a second item and adds: "This is because the periodic *salvation of Spring* was probably the strongest root of belief in the saviour." He also writes of Nature's cycle in general, subsequently citing Dionysus as an example:

> Nature's cycle, in fact, is at one and the same moment the most saddening and the most joyous that we know. Not only the melancholy of Autumn but also Winter's famine, not merely the poetry of Spring but equally Summer's superfluity, all cooperate in the mighty form of the saviour who dies and rises again, who slumbers and awakens, who departs and reappears. Of Dionysus, for example, it was said that he had his lulling to sleep and his rising up and all the fully developed saviour forms show similar characteristics.[75]

As a (3)rd item he includes saviour figures such as Demeter etc. But note that he includes "Jeshl or Yehl, the salvation-bringing raven of Tlingit"[76] here as well, figures which belong to the primal religious tradition rather than to historical religions. However, as a (4)th item, he includes *healing* as a form of salvation, adding: "One root of the saviour idea, finally, springs from the experience of being healed; when man falls ill, whoever cures him is his saviour … ."[77]

The phenomenological method thus gathers data from across the board, once again both in terms of including new categories, as well as noting new items for inclusion within the conventional categories.

One may now turn to a consideration of how the data are handled. Two points deserve special notice in this respect: (i) the recognition of the saviour form in *both* nature and history and (ii) the identification of the characteristic features of the saviour myth. One might wish to note that both have to do with the "structure" of the

[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 108.
[77] *Ibid.*

religious phenomenon under discussion, the "Saviour." In relation to the first, van der Leeuw writes:

> To primitive man life was ever one and indivisible; and thus the visionary feelings of the mystic stimulus attached themselves to the old *kouros*-form of Dionysus, feelings that inundated Greece in early historical times; and from the periodic epiphany of the saviour there developed the historic event of the god of ecstasy's entry, overcoming the resistance of prosaic and suspicious people. Thus the old Italian god of Spring, Mars, was at the same time the war-god because the commencement of the fruit year simultaneously signified the beginning of another harvest, brought in by the people as the army (*exercitus*). But wherever the saviour appears the breath of Spring always dominates, whatever its narrower or later meaning may be.[78]

As for the second, van der Leeuw identifies the following features as the key elements in the Saviour myth: A. *Birth, Epiphany*; B. *Deed of Salvation*; C. *Resurrection, Parousia*.[79]

A different kind of illustration of the working of the phenomenological method at the meso-level is provided by the attempts to discover the "meaning" of the religious life for primal human beings.

L. F. Zotz made a curious find in 1936 at Hellmichhöhle, located in the Bober-Katzbach mountain range in Silesia.[80] It consisted of the fossilised skull of a brown bear, datable to the Ice Age. It possessed one salient characteristic: its canines and incisors were worn out. The evenly spaced grooves pointed to a *deliberate* filing down of the teeth, since "bears and other predators do not wear out their incisors or great canines," leaving "no doubt [that] ice-age men undertook this dental operation. But to what end? At first glance it would seem that it was for sport, so that they could put their hands into the beast's mouth without danger of being bitten. Or the Hellmich find might prove no more than that some men had played with a captive bear. On the other hand, ethnological research provides astonishing parallels with the case we have just described."[81]

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 109–113.
[80] Johannes Maringer, *The Gods of Prehistoric Man*, ed. and trans. Mary Ilford (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 100.
[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

The astonishing parallels referred to are provided by accounts of bear cult as practised among the Gilyaks on Sakhalin and Ainus on Yesu, by Siebold in 1835 and von Schrenk in 1881.[82] These accounts described a ritual whose "high point was the 'bear feast' at which a bear was slain with much pageantry and elaborate ceremonial. The bear was a two-or-three-year-old animal that has been captured young; and so that it would be prevented from attacking or injuring anyone at the feast, its incisors and canines were cut down by means of a saw-like instrument."[83]

The connection between the fossilised skull found by L. F. Zotz and the ethnographic accounts of circumpolar hunting peoples was made by Wilhelm Koppers, who concluded:

> Such singular cultural phenomena do not occur independently. In any case, the investigator who thinks and works in the context of history must necessarily favor the theory of a connection between them. A practice which existed in central Europe in the upper paleolithic survives to this day among the border peoples of northern Asia.[84]

The phenomenological search for meaning leads one to make the connection "that the ice-age hunters, or at least some of them, like those at Hellmich, held beliefs similar to those that underlie the bear cult as practiced by modern primitives. The Gilyaks and the Ainus regard the captive bear as the guardian spirit of their settlement; it brings luck, and after it has been killed at the great winter feast, it becomes their ambassador to the mighty spirit of forest and mountain, presenting their wishes and especially obtaining for them a good hunting year."[85]

Two important points are involved here from the point of view of the phenomenological method. The first is the connection, established between *two* distinct pieces of data – one archeological and the other ethnographic in nature. Equally important is the assumption underlying the connection. One may wish to note that in this kind of anthropology of religion, for that is where the data belong, "its

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102.
[84] Cited *ibid.*, p. 102.
[85] *Ibid.*

material came on the one hand from prehistoric archeology, and on the other from the growing body of facts and opinions collected among the 'primitive' races of mankind. The study of prehistory, although fascinating in itself, left large gaps in the anthropologist's knowledge of early technology; on the subject of early supernaturalism and religion it could say very little." Thus one was faced with a problem. "The problem was solved by a theory of 'survivals' – by making an equation with the primeval savage and modern 'primitive' peoples, and by using information derived from latter to illustrate life and beliefs of former."[86]

It is no doubt tempting to consider the connection "phenomenological" yet it is really anthropological rather than phenomenological in nature, in the sense that it is based on evidence gathered from small-scale societies and not on how the phenomena appear to the actual participants. The second point is even more subversive from the point of view of the phenomenological method, for at this stage, anthropology was no doubt the study of man but it was the study or "science of man *in evolution*"[87] and the two communities involved – the paleolithic hunters and circumpolar hunting peoples in the nineteenth century – were assumed to be at the same stage of evolution for the equation to hold. However, according to the phenomenological approach, the "concepts of 'primitive' and 'highly developed' forms of religion are ... fatal for historical research."[88] This is true even when one is working at the same level of evolution as it were, for it is the evolutionary perspective as a whole which is considered phenomenologically suspect. Kristensen's statement on this point is worth citing:

> All evolutionary views and theories therefore mislead us from the start, if we let them set the pattern for our historical research. Believers have never conceived of their own religion as a link in a chain of development. Perhaps they have thought of it sometimes as the goal, but never as an intermediate link; yet in the evolutionary view, this is an indispensable concept. No believer considers his own faith to be somewhat

[86] Eric J. Sharpe, "Anthropology," in S. G. F. Brandon, *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970), pp. 83–84.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[88] W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. J. B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 13.

primitive, and the moment we begin so to think of it, we have actually lost touch with it. We are then dealing only with our own ideas of religion, and we must not delude ourselves that we have also learned to know the ideas of others. The historian and the student of Phenomenology must therefore be able to forget themselves, to be able to surrender themselves to others. Only after that will they discover that others surrender themselves to them. If they bring their own idea with them, others shut themselves off from them. No justice is then done to the values which are alien to us, because they are not allowed to speak in their own language. If the historian tries to understand the religious data from a different viewpoint than that of the believers, he negates the religious reality. For there is no religious reality other than the faith of the believers.[89]

This does not mean, however, that the case is impervious to the application of the phenomenological method. To see it in operation one has to begin by accepting the results of the equation in general terms, as attesting to the prevalence of the bear cult during the Ice Age. One is then led to notice that

> [t]he hunting artists of the upper paleolithic sometimes painted or engraved pictures of the bear on cave walls. Such pictures are rare,

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 13. Phenomenology of religion, however, did not arrive at this position without some struggle. George Alfred James points out (*Interpreting Religion* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995], p. 271): "So long as we acknowledge that the term phenomenology has differing origins, there is little difficulty in recognizing that the phenomenology of religion legitimately employs classification as the most visible feature of its approach. It can be clearly described, as it often is, as the systematic as opposed to the historical study of religion. That the exponents are non-developmental in their approach is more problematic. They certainly intend to distinguish their efforts from developmental approaches patterned either upon a Hegelian approach or an evolutionary model. The difficulty is that phenomena less familiar and less comprehensible tend, nevertheless, to be viewed as less sophisticated forms of the religion in terms of which the phenomena is understood. The problem is magnified in the case of Chantepie because although he does not purport to discuss the origin or the development of religion, he accepts the view, nevertheless, that different kinds of civilization represent differing levels of advancement. While he tries to place all religious phenomena on the same level, he accepts that there are higher and lower forms of civilization. This, however, represents not so much a weakness in the phenomenological approach, as a weakness in the thought of one early effort."

> however, and certain peculiarities are associated with them. The bear is sometimes shown with a wolf's head or a bison's tail, as though the artists had feared to portray it as it really was. They may also have intended to portray men disguised as bears, and in some cases the intention is unmistakable. Sometimes they drew only the head of a bear. Such works would seem to suggest a bear cult. *On that hypothesis, the ice-age hunter artists would have avoided any naturalistic portrayal of the bear because, like the bear-hunting peoples of our own day, they feared to call it by its own name*; moreover, they would have dressed up in bear skins to perform ritual dances, and they would have had a special veneration for the bear's head or conducted special ceremonies in its honor.[90]

A phenomenological understanding of this datum would lead us to connect this with the reluctance to write down the full name of Yahweh in early Judaism and the injunction against the portrayal of God in any form (except cursive) in Islam.

This example also enables us to examine the relationship of the phenomenological method to the anthropological, just as the previous examples enabled us to examine the phenomenological method in relation to the historical and the hermeneutical. It is worth noting here, that, although phenomenology looks askance at the evolutionary bias of anthropology, it is not averse to using the religious data provided by the anthropological method to further its own formulations. The discussion of monotheism by Mircea Eliade in his *Patterns of Comparative Religion*[91] makes full use of such data. Similarly, the research method of anthropology, specially in terms of what "has been called the 'Malinowskian cult of field-work,'"[92] contains an important phenomenological component in its faithful reporting about and adherence to the insider's perspective (although the posthumous discovery that Malinowski had 'little fellow-feeling with the Melanesians' must be considered disillusioning).

A third illustration of the operation of the phenomenological method at the meso-level is provided by the phenomena of Marian visions, made famons by Joan of Arc.

[90] Johannes Maringer, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–103, emphasis added.

[91] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 109–111.

[92] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Gregory Baum compares two sets of Marian visions – those which were reported in France during the nineteenth century, with the one reported from Mexico City in the sixteenth century.[93] The appearances in the first set include the appearance of Our Lady of Sorrows at La Salette in 1846; at Lourdes in 1848; and at Pontmain in 1871. The second set contains only one example, but a famous one:

> In 1531 a poor Indian named Juan Diego was climbing [the] hill in the way that Indian priests traditionally had done, when he saw a beautiful woman in a dress that was as splendrous as the sun. She spoke to him. She revealed her name to him. The single sentence she spoke combined Indian words and Spanish words, the Indian and Spanish symbols of God. The beautiful lady was reconciling in her the ancient religion and the new Christian message. Our Lady of Guadeloupe restored the indigenous peoples' dignity. Through her they gained access to the sphere of the divine without needing to go through the Spanish clergy. Even though they had been vanquished, their tradition and their word finally had been heard and recognized.[94]

Gregory Baum offers a political and sociological interpretation of these appearances. On the basis of his analysis of these appearances he concludes:

> All forms of expression of religious feeling have political import. This remains the case even when the pious are unaware of these implications. Different experiences will inspire different ways of perceiving the sacred and of conceiving the ethical ideal, at both the personal level and the societal. As a consequence, equally in the Church and in society, religious discourse and devotional observances sustain the movements which uphold these ideals and values.[95]

We now stand on the threshold of the interface of the phenomenological method with the politico-sociological. The approach suggested by Professor Baum is clearly reductive. He specifically states that while the attitude towards Marian piety may "at first glance seem apolitical, ... as soon as it takes root in an important

[93] Gregory Baum, "Marie, Figure Politique," *Relations* (October 1987), pp. 239–240, an English translation of which was graciously made available to me.
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

segment of the population it engenders a strong resistance to social change and culminates in exerting a political influence."[96] This attitude may be contrasted with a theological and apocalyptic one, which would argue that the 1846 vision at La Salette, in predicting that blood will flow if the contempt of the Cross continues, foretold the Revolution of 1848.[97]

The phenomenological method will avoid both the reductive and the theological routes.[98] From the phenomenological point of view the crucial point of interest in the French phenomenon would be seen to lie in the fact that while those opposed to secularism "tended to render the Blessed Virgin Mary as the symbol of their cause ... facing Marianne, the symbol of the Republic, they raised up Mary, Queen of Gauls."[99] In the case of Our Lady of Guadeloupe the interest would centre on the following perception: "Our Lady avowed that she was a virgin: but for a people whose women have been violated by victors, virginity signifies integrity and freedom, without contempt for sexuality."[100] Questions such as – what is the significance of Her virginity in the context of France, and even, what was the significance of her virginity in the case of Joan of Arc, could also be raised.

These questions possess a Weberian flavour, but the point to note is that they view the phenomenon in "expressive" rather than "reductive" terms. This is not the place to pursue the suggestions further. The purpose of the example will be served if the reader perceived how even data gathered from a socio-political angle may provide room for the application of the phenomenological method and how such a method differed from the socio-political one. In pursuing his vocation in this manner, however, it is also important on the part of the phenomenologist himself or herself to avoid falling prey to theological assumptions. Thus "on the one hand, the student of religion has to train himself not to advance his *own* theological views, whether conscious or covert, into his understanding of the

[96] *Ibid.*
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] See George Alfred James, *op. cit.*, passim.
[99] Gregory Baum, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
[100] *Ibid.*

data.[101] On the other hand, he has to avoid an easy reduction into the general social and psychological context and to really grasp the meaning of what is going on, in terms of the understanding used by the believer or the participant."[102]

The point then is not to let one's presuppositions – theological or sociological – affect one's perspective while one is engaged in exercising the phenomenological approach. This seems to be the right place to introduce two further points. The first is that as western scholars are regularly chastised for letting their western/Christian perspective colour their treatment of eastern religions, it is sobering to be reminded that the advice applies in both the directions – east and west.

> The same must apply to those who study religion from within an eastern culture. It is necessary to make a sustained effort not to advance arguments favoring Buddhism into an examination of African or European religion. For example, Buddhist apologists often refer disparagingly to Christianity as a "book" religion, as if there were just texts and dogmas to be found and no interior life or sacramental and ethical practice. This leads to a distorted view of Christianity. Of course the Bible as a book is important to all kinds of Christians, but its use and meaning in Christian life are as complex as the role of scriptures in Buddhism. A phenomenological study of Christianity should bracket off any such oversimplified preconceptions, however congenial they may seem for Buddhism apologetics.[103]

The second point pertains to Max Weber, who was "interested in the logical relationships between understanding *and* explanation,"[104] rather than explanation *alone*, which would have enabled us to place him firmly in the sociological school and overlook him in a phenomenological context. But to do so in the light of his interest in

[101] This does not mean, however, that the phenomenologist cannot benefit from data collected with a theological orientation; no less than a sociologist of religion might benefit from data collected by a religious sociology (see D. H. J. Morgan, "Sociology of Religion," in S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970], pp. 582–583).

[102] Michael Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] Van A. Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

"understanding" would be rash. The subtlety of this point is best brought out by juxtaposing his stand with that of Karl Marx, and noting that "[i]t was not, he stated clearly, his intention to substitute a one-sided idealistic interpretation of history for a one-sided materialistic interpretation. Ideas existed in a social context – indeed, it was not ideas as such that interested Weber, but ideal (and material) *interests* as they were organised in status groups."[105] The phenomenological *Verstehen* is not totally absent here, appearances notwithstanding, because "working class Baptists and middle-class Episcopalians may partake in certain common ceremonies, but the *meaning* of their participation may be very different for each particular group."[106] As Weber was "concerned with demonstrating that religion, as a major source of orientation to the world, can have an impact on society which is separable from and not reducible to social and economic status of the believers,"[107] he avoided the king of wholesale sociological reductionism which is anathema to a phenomenological perspective and leaves enough room for a phenomenological appropriation of his insights and for his inclusion in the Hall of Fame of Hermeneutics.[108]

Macro-level

The macro-level was identified earlier as the level at which one deals with entire traditions or methods, or clusters thereof.

The application of the phenomenological method at the macro-level is perhaps best presented by first indicating the affinities between the phenomenological and the psychological approaches in the study of religion. To be sure the two are not identical and Gerardus van der Leeuw devotes a section to a consideration of their relationship.[109] Significantly however, although he delimits "experimental psychology" relatively easily from phenomenology,[110] and points

[105] D. H. J. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 585.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 584.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 585.

[108] Van A. Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

[109] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, pp. 686–687.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 686.

out how psychology is "concerned purely with actual, and not the historical experiences"[111] (which fall within the more general study of religion), he is led to conclude "that the phenomenologist of religion strides backwards and forwards over the whole field of religious life, but the psychologist of religion over only a part of this."[112]

It should be noted that when we deal with myth the two methods tend to merge and in fact seem, at times, even to become virtually identical, specially in the context of Jungian psychology. This is so because a "great virtue of Jung's system is that it permits the scholar to treat of mythology as something living, since the impulses themselves are still part of the human make up. It also allows for a more positive attitude to religious symbolism than has often been the case in comparative religion."[113]

A case study consisting of the psychedelic experience of a "businessman in his early forties,"[114] induced through the ingestion of LSD, is instructive in this context. Very briefly, the subject underwent an experience "comprising a polyglot mythology of the child-hero with whom the subject identified."[115] The details of the experience are provided in a footnote.[116]

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111 *Ibid.*, p. 687, note 1.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 687.

113 Eric J. Sharpe, "Psychology of Religion," in S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 515.

114 Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), p. 225.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

116 *Ibid.*, pp. 226–227:
"Yes, the light is coming up. I see a woman lying on top of a mountain ... She is struck by a thunderbolt ... and out of this union ... I am born. A race of ugly dwarfs seek to destroy my mother and me ... so she hurries down the mountain ... hides me in a swamp ... A serpent with great jaws flicks out his tongue..draws me into his mouth ... I am swallowed ... I am passing inside the snake. This is horrible. Incredible demons line the shores of the snake's insides. Each tries to destroy me as I float by ... I reach the end of the tail and kick my way out ... raining very hard in the swamp ... I am drowning ... No ... I am caught in a net ... being pulled out of the water ... An old fisherman has caught me in his net ... The serpent rises out of the water ... grown into a huge sea monster ... opens its jaws and snaps them shut on half of the fisherman's boat. With the next bite

Apparently the subject had been spiritually inclined but had had to put these interests on hold, while he (successfully) took care of the family business. He came to "his session feeling that his very considerable business success had been purchased at the expense of an atrophied inner life, so that now he experienced himself as hollow and exhausted and had, for the past year, been strenuously attempting to remedy this condition. Neither a flirtation with Eastern mysticism nor a period of psychoanalysis had proved effective and he was left with serious doubts concerning his 'spiritual worth.'"[117] To complete the psychological account: even several years *after* the session "divine child, he says, 'continues within' him. He feels that

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it will swallow both of us. A thunderbolt comes out of the sky and smashes the boat in two, leaving half of it stuck in the monster's gullet. The fisherman takes me in his arms and swims with me towards shore ... The sea monster pursues us ... Just as we reach shote it snaps off the fisherman's leg. The fisherman continues to hold me and crawls with me in his arms to a nearby hut. His wife is there. She nurses her husband and puts me into a cradle. I am raised by this couple as their own son. They are very kind to me ... tell me I must be very special seeing as how I was drawn from the water ... They call me Aquarion. The years pass. I am now four years old but already I am tremendously strong and powerful ... Also, I know the language of birds and flowers ... talk to the animals and plants and learn many strange things. They tell me I must avenge myself on the sea monster who tried to destroy me and bit off my fisher-father's leg. I dive into the water to go and find the sea monster ... For many hours I swim around and finally I find it. It is swimming towards me at tremendous speed. It has grown gargantuan and horrible ugly ... opens its jaws to consume me but I evade them and get a strangle hold on its throat. For many days we battle together ... The sea is crimson with our blood ... Great waves are created by our combat ... I am the conqueror ... tear open its belly ... I slay the internal demons ... In its stomach I find the leg of my fisher-father. I take the leg back to land and fit it onto his stump. It instantly joins and he is whole again. My parents take me to the temple to give thanks for my victory ... We approach the high priestess with a thanks offering ... tell her my story. When she hears of it she swoons. ... She comes to and says to me, 'My womb was quickened by the thunderbolt. You are the son of ptomise whom I hid so long ago.' She raises her hands to the heavens and ... she says ... 'Speak, O Lord, to this your son. Speak to his strength and his glory. He hath prevailed over the Evil One. He hath delivered the deep of its Enemy. Set your purpose upon him Lord.' A great thunderous voice speaks: 'Aquarion, my son, you are now your own man. Go forth into the Wasteland and bring forth fruit. Know that I shall be with you always and where once there had been drought ... wherever you pass ... there shall spring up a Green Land.'"

117 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

the need no longer exists to maintain a dichotomy between his inner spiritual and his outer professional life – since the 'Green Land' is continuous and compatible with both. The child-hero remains effective as his 'activating symbolic agent,' helping him to reserve the 'whole man' he has become. Thus again, in this case, we encounter the impressive but little understood phenomenon of timeless, universal symbols and themes emerging into consciousness in a particular dramatic form adapted to the requirements of the psychedelic drug subject who becomes the dream's protagonist and thereby is transformed."[118]

How is this case to be viewed phenomenologically?

(1) The role of comparative mythology in this particular case is striking. As Robert E. L. Masters points out: that the subject's

> symbolic drama was rooted in the thematics of a great number of child-hero legends served to enhance the emotional power and meaningfulness of the experience. The student of comparative mythology will recognize in this subject's experience patterns common to legends of Sargon, Gilgamesh, Marduk, Moses, Heracles, Perseus, Dionysus, Cyrus, Jesus, Krishna, Parsifal, and a host of Year-Daimons, as well as important themes in the poerry of T. S. Eliot (whose poems, especially "The Wasteland," are greatly admired). Each of these legends as well as the subject's own symbolic creation reflect the allegory of the self in search of wholeness.[119]

(2) The connection with Jungian psychology must be noted next:

> As Jung has observed, the various child-heroes "may be regarded as illustrating the kind of psychic events that occur in the entelechy or genesis of the 'self.'" The 'miraculous birth' tries to depict the way in which this genesis is experienced. Since it is a psychic genesis, everything must happen non-empirically – e.g., by means of a virgin birth, or by miraculous conception, or birth from unnatural organs. The motifs of 'insignificance,' exposure, abandonment, danger, try to show how precarious is the psychic possibility of wholeness, that is, the enormous difficulties to be met with in attaining this 'highest good.' They also signify every growing thing to the law of maximum self-fulfillment, while at the same time the environmental influences place all sorts of insuperable obstacles in the way of individuation. More especially the threat to one's inmost self from dragons and serpents points to the danger of the newly acquired consciousness being swallowed up again by the instinctive psyche, the unconscious.[120]

[118] *Ibid.*
[119] *Ibid.*, pp. 228–229.

The crux of the matter lies in the fact that while phenomenology of religion is at its most natural in trying to identify structures that seem to lie in the consciousness of the sympathetic observer, it becomes controversial when it goes for *underlying* or *overarching* structures, which is what begins to happen at the macro- and mega-levels. This search for "underlying structures for human experience, whether psychological, sociological, or cybernetic"[121] takes one to the very frontiers of the phenomenological method, which are inhabited by the likes of Jung and Eliade, with a Jungian example serving to form the basis of our continuing discussion at the moment. Michael Pye hesitates to consider these applications of the phenomenology of religion as "phenomenological" in the "strict sense of the term" because "such theories import modes of understanding which go far beyond the self-understanding of particular believers or participants. *Even if they were not contradicted, it becomes impossible to apply the criteria of strictly phenomenological study.*"[122]

It seems to me that there is some room for manoeuvre here, depending on whether we will apply the *negative* criterion of non-contradiction or the *positive* criterion of actual affirmation in checking out the response of the believers.

This point is well illustrated by the two tables provided by Michael Pye to demonstrate the application of the phenomenological method to the "Interpretation of Archaic Religions" and to the "Interpretation of Historically Articulated Religions," keeping the sociological method within sight. The tables are presented below.

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 229.
[121] Michael Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
[122] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

TABLE 1
INTERPRETATION OF ARCHAIC RELIGIONS METHOD

		METHOD	
CONTENT	Sociological (anthropological) and psychological studies	Phenomenological (including typological studies	Creative and evaluative approaches
Function and use of religious symbolism			
Content and meaning of religious symbolism			
General interpretations of religious symbolism			
	Criteria: (a) factual data (b) work of other scholars *N.B.* Conclusions may contradict self-understanding of believers	*Criteria:* (a) factual data (self-understanding of believers) (b) work of other scholars *N.B.* Conclusions must not contradict believers' self-understanding	*Criteria:* No precise criteria *N.B.* Value can only be discerned from later historical perspective

TABLE 2
INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICALLY ARTICULATED RELIGIONS

		METHOD	
CONTENT	Sociological (anthropological) and psychological studies	Phenomenological (including typological studies	Creative and evaluative approaches
Dynamics of religion			
Comparative hermeneutics			
Joint interpretation of religious traditions			
	Criteria: (a) factual data (b) work of other scholars *N.B.* Conclusions may contradict self-understanding of believers	*Criteria:* (a) factual data (self-understanding of believers) (b) work of other scholars *N.B.* Conclusions must not contradict believers' self-understanding	*Criteria:* No precise criteria *N.B.* Value can only be discerned from later historical perspective

If we take a narrow view of the phenomenological method, then its applications will be restricted to the second column under "method." If, however, one relaxes the contradiction criterion to include "value to be discerned from later historical perspective" as *not* amounting to contradiction of the believer's perspective, as something which puts the contradiction criterion on "hold" for a while, then the third column could *also* be included within the operation of the phenomenology of religion. In terms of the vocabulary which has been put into play in this chapter, it would mean that the operation of the phenomenological method at the macro- and mega-level could also be included within the phenomenology of religion.

Perhaps our ends would be better served if we chose to refer to the phenomenological method here in the same breath as the History of Religions and asked: "Why is the 'History of Religions' usually expressed in the plural whereas the 'Phenomenology of Religion' is always referred to in the singular?"[123] For it is in its incarnation as the History of Religions that the phenomenological method begins to test its limits. And it is in this capacity that the difficulties opened up by the application of the phenomenological method at the macro-level (read History of Religions) have to be dealt with, difficulties which have to do with such claims as the following: "Depth psychology has taught us that the symbol delivers its message and fulfills its function even when its meaning escapes awareness."[124] For if it escapes awareness then it is difficult if not impossible to determine whether the insider's understanding has been compromised in being surpassed.

The work of the Cross-Cultural Religious Ideas Project, a four-year research project which concluded its work in 1999 at Boston University, with Robert C. Neville serving as its Project Director and Peter L. Berger and John H. Berthrong as Co-Directors, also belongs here. It identified comparison as a "fundamental element in human

[123] Ursula King, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[124] Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 106–107.

rationality" and undertook the ambitious step of comparing religious ideas at the level of "religious truth," "ultimate realities" and the "human condition."[125]

The significance of the phenomenological comparisons at this level may be illustrated with the help of two examples – one in which the findings of the Project are used to validate one's own hypotheses and another in which hypotheses are advanced in tbe light of the approach adopted by the Project.

The first example is provided by the discussion of ecology in the context of world religions. It is possible to propose a generalisation on the basis of the material available in the field which will correlate the attitudes of *families* of religions towards *nature*, and, through this intermediate variable, pronounce on their ecological implications. If we classify the religious traditions of humanity into the three families of religions, namely, the Abrahamic, the Indic, and the Chinese, then the following thesis may be advanced: "The Western attitude to nature is predominantly scientific and technological, centred on human beings; the Sineatic attitude is aesthetic and poetic, patterned on the relationships in society; while the Indian attitude is mystical and metaphysical."[126]

This may be helpful. But the Project warns against comparisons "grasped intuitively and expressed gracefully." And this warning seems to apply if an attempt is made to correlate the three families of religions with the three families of human rights: (1) individual, or political and civil liberties; (2) solidary or socio-economic rights; and (3) collective rights, or the right to self-determination. It is tempting to propose that the Western family of religions meshes naturally with personal rights, the Indic with solidary rights (given

[125] Three separate volumes, edited by Robert Cummings Neville, bearing these three titles, represent the work of the Project and await publication. They are being published by the State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y. For more on the project see Robert Cummings Neville, "The Boston University Comparative Ideas Project and the History of Religions," paper presented at the XVIIIth quinquennial World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) in Durban, August 5–12, 2000.

[126] Ravi Ravindra, *Yoga and the Teaching of Krishna: Essays on the Indian Spiritual Traditions* (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1998), pp. 134–155.

the Hindu caste system on the one hand and the Buddhist Sangha on the other) and the East Asian with collective rights, given the cohesive role Confucianism plays in that part of the world.

Intellectual mapping of this kind can be exciting, but needs to be checked out for categorical depth and empirical validity.

The results of the Project provide useful material for checking categorical depth. Since rights and duties (or obligations) are regularly correlated in the ethical discourse around human rights, it seems desirable to examine the findings of the Project on obligation, to determine if the three families line up on a similar syntagmatic axis in relation to obligations, as had been proposed in the case of rights. The relevant passage is cited below:

> Christianity thus shares with Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, but not so much with the other religions studied, a two-level approach to obligation: one level is the morality of ordinary life, and the other is the removal of existentially defining constraints to the plain pursuit of the morality of ordinary life. For Buddhism, ignorance has to be removed, with the liberation from craving, before ordinary morality can be taken at face value, and one's religious identity is a function of removing that ignorance. Similarly for Advaita Vedānta, human beings are ordinarily blinded and distorted by *māyā* and cannot find their true self that allows for ordinary morality at face value without learning Advaitic discrimination and personal actualization. Buddhism, Advaita, and Christianity give different specifying accounts of the second-level problem of obligation. For Chinese religion, Judaism, and Islam, there is continuity between ordinary morality and ultimate obligation.[127]

The results diverge. To put it somewhat colourfully, Christianity, which belongs to the Abrahamic family, is in bed with Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, while Chinese religions are found consorting with Judaism and Islam – of Abrahamic ancestry. The macro generalisations had foundered at the meso-level, as it were. Could history vindicate the thesis in some way if categories will not? Even here one is constrained to note that the best empirical (or historical) fit for the families of rights is also *not* provided by the

[127] Robert Cummings Neville, ed., *The Human Condition: A Theory and Case-Study of the Comparison of Religious Ideas* (Boston: Cross-Cultural Religious Ideas Project, 1999; unpublished bound volume), p. 422.

contours of the threefold classification of world religions but by the political geography of the Cold War era. In the time between 1948 and 1993 the so-called Free World provided the primary illustration of the prevalence of personal rights or civil liberties, while the Communist world highlighted the cultivation of socio-economic rights. Professor Baum notes: "While American journalists and television reporters concentrated on the fate of political dissidents, the equivalent Soviet communication teams focused on the masses of unemployed and life in the urban ghettos where people lined up at soup kitchens and food banks."[128] And of course the Third World, comprising the many countries of Asia and Africa, highlighted the exercise of collective rights, specially the right to self-determination, having just emerged from a period of colonial subjugation.

The moral obviously is that it is all right to compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges and it may even be all right to compare apples and oranges, so long as one does not end up with a lemon.

In other words, distinctions among religions had turned out to be more important than distinctions among families of religions. It is this point which I would like to pursue a little further. I had hoped that families of religions might provide a schema for comparing materials from various religions; let me now try to replace that failed hope with a new one: that projects such as the one we are involved in at the moment might generate their own schema, through the comparison of individual items from these various families of religions.

Consider two practices from within Hinduism – that of Satī and that of Devadāsī – both of which have been officially abolished. The Satī gave up her life on the pyre of her husband out of dedication to him as if he were a god, or else lived out her life in austerity, as a pious widow. Even here the Satī, upon the death of the husband, may express her devotion not to the body of her husband by perishing with it but to a subtler component of his personality. This possibility is driven home in the following parable narrated by Rāmakṛṣṇa:

[128] Gregory Baum, "Human Rights: An Ethical Perspective," in *The Ecumenist* (May/June 1994), p. 66.

A certain devout lady, who was also a faithful wife, lived with her husband, serving him and their children with a loving heart and at the same time keeping her mind fixed on the Lord. At her husband's death, as soon as the cremation was over, she broke her glass bangles and wore a pair of gold bracelets in their place. People wondered at her unnatural conduct, but she explained to them, "Hitherto my husband's body was fragile like the glass bangles; that ephemeral body is now gone and he is therefore like one unchangeable and whole in every respect. His body is no longer fragile. So I have discarded the fragile glass bangles and put on ornaments of a permanent nature."[129]

In these ways the Satī may dedicate her life to the husband as a god but the Devadāsī was actually dedicated to a god, who was her husband, in contrast to the Satī for whom the husband was god. And the Devadāsī, again in contrast to the widow, lived a conspicuously uninhibited life. Note the paradox: asceticism, even to the point of self-immolation, is the lot of one married to someone whom she treats *as* a god, but one married to the god, whom she treats as a husband, namely the Devadāsī, lives in the lap of luxury. Can we mediate this polar opposition with the figure of the nun in Roman Catholicism – who is the bride of God/Christ but whose life-style is not that of the Devadāsī but of the Satī, in the sense of the pious widow? The light the juxtaposition of these instances sheds on each other I have described elsewhere as the phenomena of reciprocal illumination,[130] for want of a better expression and let me conclude this section by saying that I see great possibilities for the application of this approach lying inherent in the method to comparison adopted by the Project.

[129] *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna: An Exhaustive Collection* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987), p. 334, saying 1113.

[130] Arvind Sharma, "Reciprocal Illumination: A New Direction in Religious Studies?," in Klaus K. Klostermaier and Larry W. Hurtado, eds., *Religious Studies: Issues, Prospects and Proposals* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 455–467. The study of religion is obviously in need of some such concept, for which the expression "mutual irradition" was used at the Parliament of World's Religions when it met from December 1–8, 1999 at Cape Town (see *1999 Parliament of World's Religions* [Cape Town, South Africa and Chicago, Ill.: Council for a Parliament of World's Religions, 1999], p. 136).

Mega-level

The mega-level represents the most general level. The application of the phenomenology of religion at the mega-level would address the bedrock issues of religious life.

The issue of the personal vs. impersonal nature of religious reality would be one such issue, as it keeps surfacing constantly in all kinds of contexts and at all levels. It can even be identified in the discussion of Mana, in the context of primal religion. Jan de Vries remarks that "Radin strongly opposed the fashionable idea that mana was an impersonal and universally effective power that came to be personified later on. The opposite is true. From the beginning, supernatural power is an attribute of the deity."[131] At the other end, it surfaces in the study of comparative mysticism. R. C. Zaehner remarks:

> Since my election to the Spalding Professorship of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford in 1952, my principal interest (apart from the study of the great religions as such) has been in the phenomenon of mysticism. In my *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Clarendon Press, 1957) I tried to show that there are varieties of mystical experience just as there are varieties of religious experience in general. The great divide seemed to be between those types of mysticism which regarded love as being the central phenomenon of the whole experience and those which, disregarding love altogether, expressed themselves exclusively in terms either of unity or of the escape or 'liberation' from time, the phenomenal world, and all that conditions it. Very rarely, it seemed, did the two combine, for very few people among the mystics themselves apparently had had both experiences and witnessed to the distinction between the two. In that book I was able to cite the Flemish mystic of the fourteenth century, Ruysbroeck, almost alone. Subsequently I discovered that the same distinction had been made by the Muslim mystics, al-Junayd of Baghdad, Ibn Ṭufayl of Andalusia, and the Iranian, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, and, on the Hindu side, pre-eminently in the Bhagavad-Gītā.[132]

When from a student of mysticism we turn to an actual mystic, we encounter a similar divide. The mystic in this case is Rāmakṛṣṇa (1836–1886). An issue much debated in Hindu thought and practice

[131] Jan de Vries, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

[132] R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgītā* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 2–3.

pertains to whether the ultimate reality, Brahman, is ultimately Impersonal (*nirguṇa*) or Personal (*saguṇa*). The best known philosophical advocates of these two positions respectively are Śaṅkara (eighth century) and Rāmānuja (eleventh century). We excerpt part of the conversation between Rāmakṛṣṇa, the master, and his disciple, Narendra, on this point, as it took place on March 11, 1885:

> MASTER: "Śaṅkara's Non-dualistic explanation of Vedānta is true, and so is the Qualified Non-dualistic interpretation of Rāmānuja."
>
> NARENDRA: "What is Qualified Non-dualism?"
>
> MASTER: "It is the theory of Rāmānuja. According to this theory, Brahman, or the Absolute, is qualified by the universe and its living beings. These three – Brahman, the world, and living beings – together constitute One. Take the instance of a bel-fruit. A man wanted to know the weight of the fruit. He separated the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. But can a man get the weight by weighing only the flesh? He must weigh flesh, shell and seeds together. At first it appears that the real thing in the fruit is the flesh, and not its seeds or shell. Then by reasoning you find that the shell, seeds, and flesh all belong to the fruit; the shell and seeds belong to the same thing that the flesh belongs to. Likewise, in spiritual discrimination one must first reason, following the method of 'Not this, not this': God is not the universe; God is not the living beings; Brahman alone is real and all else is unreal. Then one realizes, as with the bel-fruit, that the Reality from which we derive the notion of Brahman is the very Reality that evolves the idea of living beings and the universe. The Nitya and the Līlā are the two aspects of one and the same Reality; therefore, according to Rāmānuja, Brahman is qualified by the universe and the living beings. This is the theory of Qualified Non-dualism."[133]

According to Śaṅkara's non-dualistic position, on the other hand, "Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. All these names and forms are illusory, like a dream. What Brahman is cannot be described. One cannot even say that Brahman is a Person."[134]

A leading philosopher of religion again alludes to the same divide while addressing the question of modes of experiencing divine reality, which is one of the three kinds of differences among religious traditions he identifies.

[133] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1969), pp. 733–734.

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

> The most prominent example of the first kind of difference is probably that between the experience of the divine as personal and as nonpersonal. In Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the theistic strand of Hinduism, the Ultimate is apprehended as personal goodness, will, and purpose under the different names of Jahweh, God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva. On the other hand in Hinduism as interpreted by the Advaita Vedānta school, and in Theravada Buddhism, ultimate reality is apprehended as nonpersonal. Mahayana Buddhism is a more complex tradition, including both nontheistic Zen and quasi-theistic Pure Land Buddhism. There is, perhaps, in principle no difficulty in holding that these personal and nonpersonal experiences of the Ultimate can be nnderstood as complementary rather than as incompatible. For if, as every profound form of religion has affirmed, the Ultimate Reality is infinite and exceeds the scope of our finite human categories, that reality may be both personal Lord and nonpersonal Ground of being. At any rate, there is a program for thought in the exploration of what Aurobindo called "the logic of the infinite" and the question of the extent to which predicates that are incompatible when attributed to a finite reality may no longer be incompatible when referred to infinite reality.[135]

Once again we are now on the outer reaches of the phenomenology of religion. One of the central claims of the upholders of the Impersonal view of reality is that its experience corresponds to the experience of "pure awareness," "consciousness without an object." Such a claim is problematical from the perspective of philosophical phenomenology, for which consciousness is always consciousness *of*.[136] It is less problematical from the perspective of the phenomenology of religion, because the phenomenological method brackets religious value-judgements. From such a neutral stance, it can entertain a depiction of the structure of consciousness in which it is described as unassociated with any object or attribute. Nevertheless, it remains problematical as phenomenology of religion is more at home in dealing with structures which appear *in* consciousness rather than with the structure of consciousness itself.

[135] John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 115.

[136] Evan M. Zuesse, "The Role of Intentionality in the Phenomenology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1983), pp. 51–72.

VII

In the foregoing discussion the operation of the phenomenological method was examined in several ways and at several levels. In the first section a phenomenology of the methods in the study of religion itself was proposed. This led to an identification of the four levels, which were labelled micro, meso, macro and mega. In the second, a major section, the operation of the phenomenological method at these four levels was described and analysed.

In the final section one may try to simplify the complexities evolved earlier, by harking to the four kinds of phenomenological studies in religion distinguished by Jacques Waardenburg: "(1) *general phenomenology*, basically connected with morphology or typology; (2) *special phenomenology*, which aims at identifying meaningful patterns in a 'chosen set of phenomenon,' or 'religious facts of a given society' or between those two, (suggestions of a phenomenological ethnography here); (3) *reflective phenomenology*, or that which reflects on the phenomenon of religion itself (not excluding the secular) and (4) *existential phenomenology*, which deals with human life as such."[137]

Evan M. Zuesse is inclined to reduce these four categories to two: (1) essentialistic and (2) contextualistic.[138] Although Zuesse does not make such a specific allocation, one would presume that the last two categories mentioned by Waardenburg fall into the essentialistic category and the first two into the contextualistic. He then makes the interesting observation that the "classical methodology works in the phenomenology of religion have generally used an essentialistic approach and it is only recently that explicitly worked-out methodologies for a more contextualistic approach have been broached (chiefly by Ninian Smart and Wilfred C. Smith)... There is a need, in short, for contextual sophistication, even if there has not been a well-worked out rationale for it."[139]

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137 Jacques Waardenburg, *Reflections on the Study of Religion: Including an Essay on the Work of Gerardus van der Leeuw* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978), pp. 105–106.

138 Evan M. Zuesse, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

139 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Having identified so many levels at which the study of religion might be conducted and the phenomenology of religion practised, perhaps one can now reach out for the *meta*-level, a level that could also be identified as one moves beyond it! Kees Bolle remarks:

> ... At a certain moment we must forget the problems we have learned to discern, forget the conditionings of our own questions, and deal with the stuff of religion. When we formulate in the end what we have understood, we may even have lost all sympathy for any phenomenological view of religion. It takes many different students to make up the discipline of the history of religions.[140]

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140 Kees Bolle, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii. Also see Arvind Sharma, "Playing Hardball in Religious Studies," *Council on the Study of Religion: Bulletin* 15:1 (1984), pp. 3–4; Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), p. 143, note 25, etc.

CHAPTER VIII

Misconceptions about the Phenomenological Study of Religion in the Scientific Study of Religion

I

Interdisciplinary studies are particularly susceptible to the following problem: scholars of one discipline form stereotypes about how scholars in another discipline tend to deal with areas of mutual interest to the two disciplines or types of disciplines. In this chapter nine such misconceptions, which social-scientific scholars of religion tend to form about humanistic scholars of religion, are identified and clarified.

The academic study of religion is multi-traditional and polymethodic. That is to say, the study embraces the study of numerous religious traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Shinto, African religions and so on; and it studies the data, provided by these traditions through a whole battery of methods such as the historical, the phenomenological, the sociological, etc.

This chapter focuses on its polymethodic nature. The various methods employed in the study of religion are often divided into two categories: the humanistic and the social-scientific. In terms of this division the historical, the phenomenological, the hermeneutical, the philosophical methods, etc. are usually considered humanistic in nature while the anthropological, the sociological and the psychological, by contrast, are described as scientific or, more often, social-scientific in nature. Moreover, these broad categories of methods are not only considered different but are also sometimes viewed as antagonistic to each other, although some scholars prefer to look upon them as complementary. For the purposes of this chapter I have chosen to focus on the perspective which tends to look upon them as competitive rather than complementary in nature.

In examining the literature in the field I discovered that the practitioners of the social-scientific method have developed certain stereotypes about the way religion is studied by those scholars who belong to the humanistic camp, as it were, and who are often called religionists (i.e., those who study religion from the perspective of Humanities studies) as distingnished from the social scientists.

It might be useful to add by way of an explanation of the term 'religionists' that while in Continental Europe it is sometimes used to refer to people who are apologetic about religion, in the United States the word does not necessarily carry a *negative* charge. It is actually meant as a neutral description of one who studies religion nonreductively, although those who study religion reductively are of course at liberty to accuse 'religionists' of having such a hidden agenda!

I now proceed to identify nine such misconceptions, which, in my opinion, the social scientists have formed about the way religion is studied by the religionists, namely, phenomenologically.

II

(1) *That the way religionists study religion is theological.*

This misconception arises from the fact that, in its earliest phase, comparative religion entailed comparing other religions with Christianity, in order to establish the theological supremacy of Christianity.[1] This, however, was only a phase in its evolution and remains only a part of it, and that too now pursued properly in theology, from which religious studies has tried to distance itself.[2] Another complicating factor lies in the fact that even when theologians eschew a theological *use* of comparison, they continue to use the gains made through comparative and phenomenological studies for doing their own theology, without pejorative intent.[3]

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1 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1986), Chapter VII; William E. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 84.
2 *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.
3 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–235.

However, the fact remains that this is a misunderstanding, even if there are good reasons for it to arise. This misconception is best exposed by analysing the subtlest element which gives rise to it. It arises from the fact that, *superficially*, both theology and religion seem to deal with the same content. Thus when Mircea Eliade distinguishes the procedure of the historian of religions from that of the theologian, he writes: "All theology implies a systematic reflection on the *content* of religious experience, aiming at a deeper and clearer understanding of the relationships between god-creator and man-creature."[4] It seems that, at least on the face of it, the comparative perspective does something similar. William E. Paden explains: "Sacred ritual is also an important part of the language of religion. We have seen how it can be explained sociologically, but it can also be viewed as a vehicle of religious expression in its own right."[5]

What then is the difference between religion and theology? It consists in the different way the *content* is contextnalised. In theology, the reflection aims at "a deeper and clearer understanding of the relationships between god-creator and man-creature." In religion, the reflection aims at showing and seeing this particular content, e.g., ritual, in comparison with other rituals, so that one can identify what it has in common with others and wherein it differs from others. "Because sacredness is always embodied in particular forms, students of comparative religion are expected to see that it is not the literal, surface aspect of the forms or objects that are revered, but the transhuman force or sacredness felt *in* them."[6]

(2) *That the way religionists study religion is not objective but subjective because even when they study the same facts they come up with different subjective conclusions.*

This point has been made with particular force against the phenomenology of religion, as in practising it one is supposed to suspend objectivity. This sometimes gives rise to results of a highly unscien-

4 Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 88, emphasis added.
5 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 71, emphasis added.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

tific nature, for while "phenomenology can be characterized as an approach to the study of religion, yet when it is used for presenting phenomena there appear to be as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists, each preceeding from a particular background of religious experience and academic training unique to the individual."[7]

This depiction, however, contains elements of caricature. To understand what is involved here one must first establish the role of 'phenomenology of religion' in the study of religion clearly. This may be explained as follows: "The study of religious patterns is sometimes referred to as the 'phenomenology of religion.' The word *phenomenon* literally means something 'observable' (from the Greek *phainomena*, 'appearance'). Phenomenology is the study of things in their observable aspects as opposed to their causality, and the term has that meaning in the sciences as well as in religion. The 'phenomenology of religion' first became a name for this classificatory phase of study, and later was given fuller meaning by including in it the principles and process of *understanding* religious phenomena."[8]

Two points need to be clearly grasped in this context. The first is that *phenomenon* is used here in a sense *common* to religion and science. As Douglas Allen points out: "One encounters nonphilosophical phenomenologies in the natural sciences, especially in the field of physics. With the term *phenomenology* scientists have usually wanted to emphasize the descriptive, as contrasted with the explanatory, conception of their science. (*In the phenomenology of religion a similar emphasis shall be uncovered, as phenomenologists submit that their approach describes, but does not explain, the nature of religious phenomena.*)"[9]

The second point is that the meaning which the religionists seek is the meaning it has for the believer. That *mental* fact in religion corresponds to the physical or real fact in science.[10] When pheno-

7 Willard G. Oxtoby, "Religionswissenschaft Revisited," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), pp. 597–598.
8 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75.
9 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, p. 273.
10 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

menologists differ among themselves they are differing the way scientists or sociologists or psychologists differ among themselves, in trying to understand or explain the same phenomena.

(3) *What the religionists study is not factual but subjective even if the religionists want to study religion 'objectively' or from the outside.*

One may begin by noting that religionists not only want to, but do study religion from the outside, in a scientific sense. In fact this trend reflects the impact of the growth of science itself. As John H. Hick explains: "This view of religion represents a logical development, within an increasingly technological society, of what has been variously called scientism, positivism, and naturalism. This development is based upon the assumption – engendered by the tremendous, dramatic, and still accelerating growth of scientific knowledge and achievement – that the truth concerning any aspect or alleged aspect of reality is to be found by the application of the methods of scientific investigation to the relevant phenomena. God is not a phenomenon available for scientific study, but religion is. There can be a history, a phenomenology, a psychology, a sociology, and a comparative study of religion. Hence, religion has become an object of intensive investigation and God is perforce identified as an idea that occurs within this complex phenomenon of religion."[11]

However, even in such fields of science as medicine, especially the branch which deals with mental health, what the patient tells may be subjective, but it does not cease to be factual on that account. Nor are external facts always true – such as the apparent rising and setting of the sun. Nor are subjective facts always wrong – such as the feeling of hunger or thirst.

(4) *Even when religionists say that they are dealing with historical facts they confuse fact with interpretation. What actually happens is factual but what the believer makes of it is conjectural. Yet a fact of religious history invariably combines (or one may even say confuses) these two and so do religionists.*

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11 John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (third edition) (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1983), p. 87.

The distinction established in the above statement is clearly recognised by religionists. Mircea Eliade states, for instance, that "when a tree becomes a cult object, it is not as a *tree* that it is venerated, but as a *hierophany*, that is, a manifestation of the sacred. And every religious act, by the simple fact that it is *religious*, is endowed with a meaning … ."[12] There are thus two facts: the physical fact of the tree and the mental fact of its meaning. In order for the fact to be a fact of religious history one must know the tree as tree, and also understand the meaning it has for the believer. The term history is used in religion in both these senses. G. van der Leeuw clearly recognises the first sense when he says: "For the historian everything is directed first of all to establishing what has actually happened; and in this he can never succeed unless he understands. But also, when he fails to understand, he must describe what he has found, even if it remains at the stage of mere cataloguing."[13] Even G. van der Leeuw feels that the historian must try to understand; the exact nature of this understanding in the historical sense has been clarified by W. B. Kristensen as fidelity to the "believer's testimony."[14] The historical fact, as comprising the believer's understanding, does not necessarily become something arbitrary because one is dealing here with a person and not an inanimate object. The mental understanding of the person, as fused with the physical, constitutes historical fact in this situation.

Historical fact thus understood is a focus of constant vigil in religious studies, which is equally alert to the existential fusion and the analytical separability of the two dimensions. In relation to religious symbols, for instance, Eliade points out that, in this context, to "say that a symbol 'has' a 'history' can mean two things: (a) that this symbol was constituted at a certain historical moment and that it could not have existed *before* that moment; (b) that this symbol has been diffused, beginning from a precise cultural center, and that for this reason we must not consider it as spontaneously

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12 Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 95.

13 G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963)), Vol. II, p. 686.

14 See Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

rediscovered in all the cultures where it is fonnd."[15] Let ns consider sense (a) first: "It is evident ... that the spade could not have been associated with the phallus, nor agricultural work homologized to the sexual act before the *discovery* of agriculture."[16] Herein the *phallus* precedes the discovery of agriculture. There is here an accretion of meaning but not of object. The *spade* represents accretion of both meaning and object. Thus objects can change meaning; change of meaning can change objects; objects can replace each other while retaining the same meaning; meanings can change in relation to the same object. In sense (b) Eliade illustrates the case of an object changing but retaining the same meaning with the help of *maize*, which appeared in Europe in the post-Columbian era, but still symbolically signifies leaf.[17]

(5) *If the believer's point of view is so significant then religionists can only study the living religions, while many of them seem to be studying religions no longer alive. Moreover, even in the case of living religions, religionists can only study these religions in their present state.*

While it may be true that if "of the various ways of finding out what something means to a person concerned, one way is to ask him,"[18] this method cannot be applied to the past. Religionists will be the first to admit this; they will also maintain that the case is by no means hopeless. First, there are actnal cases when a reconstruction on these lines has been successfully attempted. Thus Wilfred Cantwell Smith is convinced that what may be called "personalization can be achieved also ... in the case of the religion of a historical community that has ceased to exist: Frankfort's recent *Ancient Egyptian Religion* differs from the first Western monograph, by Erman, some forty years earlier, in considerable part as a study of people over a study of data."[19]

15 Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
16 *Ibid.*
17 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
18 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

As a corrective against regarding this objection constituting too formidable an obstacle, one might do well to consider the extent to which we can communicate effectively even in direct personal relations. Presumably there would be far fewer divorces if this were the case. Consider, however, the following piece of conversation between the Confucian Hui Tzu and the Taoist Chuang Tzu,

> ... who on an afternoon's stroll came to a bridge over the Hao River. "Look how the minnows dart hither and thither at will. Such is the pleasure fish enjoy," Chuang Tzu remarked.
>
> "You are not a fish," responded Hui Tzu. "How do you know what gives pleasure to fish?"
>
> "You are not I," said Chuang Tzu. "How do you know I don't know what gives pleasure to fish?"[20]

The point, of course, is that even in real life we are dealing with approximations, and while in the case of living religions they might be closer than otherwise, they are still approximations. In fact, as religionists, what one *methodologically seeks is an approximation*, as in real life, otherwise one would have to become the other person to understand him or her fully. As Kristensen noted: if in studying Islam we become a Mnslim, then we are no longer the student but have become the object of that study.

> The historian cannot understand the absolute character of the religious data in the same way that the believer understands them. The historian's standpoint is a different one. There is a distance between him and the object of the research, he cannot identify himself with it as the believer does. We cannot become Mohammedans when we try to understand Islam, and if we could, our study would be at an end: we should ourselves then directly experience the reality.[21]

Even in real life, however, of "the various ways of finding out what something means to a person" although "to ask him" might be one way, it may not be the only way and in fact it may not even be the best way, as the following account demonstrates:

20 Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), pp. 217–218.
21 W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 7.

In India today it is not unusual to find a person who denies he is a Hindu but who acts in a manner which others associate with Hinduism. I recall an occasion in India in which a dinner companion who, after assuring me he had completely deserted Hinduism, carefully removed a fly from his glass of water, placed it on the floor, and then observed, "I think it will be all right now." I could not refrain from reminding my friend that his act revealed more about his religion than his words.[22]

(6) *Religionists do not understand the meaning of understanding. Sometimes they use it to refer to the understanding of the believers and sometimes to their own understanding.*

Confusion on this point arises because, typically, scientists and social scientists confine their analysis to the distinction between explanation and interpretation. In such discussions *explanation* is associated with *causes* and *interpretation* with *meanings*.[23] Hence it is argued that when religionists try to understand what a rite, ritual or symbol means to a believer they are no longer dealing with facts but rather, with interpretations.

The range of the discussion must first be extended to clear up this misconception. One must distinguish between *description*, *explanation* and *interpretation*. It must further be recognised that just as explanation has to do with causes, and interpretation with meanings, description has to do with *understanding*. Then the full significance of Eliade's statement becomes evident, that "the ultimate aim of the historian of religion is to understand, and to make understandable to others, religious man's behaviour and mental universe."[24]

What is the difference between understanding and meaning? There can be two kinds of understandings: when I understand what somebody else understands, that is, when I understand what something means to somebody else. When I grasp what a ritual etc. means to

[22] Troy Wilson Organ, *Hinduism: Its Historical Development* (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1974), p. 2.

[23] Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 63.

[24] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p. 162.

the believer (and not to me), then I understand *him* and thereby *my* understanding is advanced. As I can now say I know what it means to him, the word 'meaning' can be applied here, but not without falling victim to the semantic ambiguity of the English language.

Thus what religionists aim for, first of all, is to make the understanding of the believer, of what he or she is involved in, part and parcel of *their* understanding of him or her. His or her understanding is prior to our understanding of his or her understanding. No doubt this is a point of some subtlety, even complexity and initial perplexity, but understanding the clear senses of the understandings involved should make it understood.

(7) *Religionists confer veto power to the believers in their understanding of religion.*

The previous point creates room for another misconception. If the "point of view of the believer" holds such a privileged place in the religionist's discourse, then is not the study, despite all its pretence of scientific objectivity, at the mercy of the vagaries of the believer's fancy? One must refer back here to Kristensen's crystalline comments cited earlier, as translated by Sharpe.[25]

The believer no doubt has the right to be wrong but that does not mean that therefore it is wrong for us to be right.[26] The point at issue here is not whether the believer is right but rather what is the *right* of the believer in relation to his or her tradition which we are studying. That this right is absolute should not be confused with his being absolutely right. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith pragmatically observes: "I do not suggest that a personalist epistemology is infallible. It is possible to be inadequately informed, and even misinformed. Personal explanations must be checked against or coordinated with texts and other overt data. The personalist approach does not replace other methods, but in our world surely cannot fail to supplement."[27] Smith also provides reasons for the limitations of a personalist epistemology: "... the insider can speak authoritatively

[25] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

[26] Ibid., p. 224.

[27] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

only for the present"[28] and that too "with final authority only for himself. The subtle question of the relation of one man's faith to his community's faith"[29] doubtless complicates the issue but not negate it. It also leads directly to the next point.

Scientists and social scientists have typically failed to distinguish between a *believer* and *believers*, and, among the believers, between *ordinary* and *scholarly* believers. Thus while, on the one hand, Wilfred Cantwell Smith states "that no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers,"[30] he also insists that "the reverse is certainly not true. Not every statement about Islam that is acceptable to Muslims is *ipso facto* true: one can flatter or beguile."[31] Moreover, the members of a tradition itself can be scholars. This is of particular relevance in the study of religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith points out that Huston Smith states in the preface of his book *The Religions of Man* (1958): "he had *scholarly* members of the faiths concerned read some of the chapters."[32] This does not come as a surprise to Wilfred Cantwell Smith as it "implicitly supports the principle for validity which I have formulated, as well as showing how the procedure can be productive."[33] Huston Smith's book, incidentally, also proleptically rebuts the criticism that only the believer can really know what he or she believes in, inasmuch as it is unique and therefore incommunicable. For he writes: "I have (over the years) been 'charged' with belonging to all the seven traditions I describe in *The Religions of Man* – charged with belonging formally to four, and at heart to three ... ."[34]

Moreover, even when the primary role of the believer for the *understanding* of his or her religion is acknowledged, it does not automatically extend to a *presentation* of the tradition, so that he or she must receive precedence everywhere like a trump of cards. "It is possible both in theory and practice for an outside scholar to break

28 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
29 *Ibid.*, note 24.
30 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
32 *Ibid.*, note 25, emphasis added.
33 *Ibid.*
34 Huston Smith, "Postmodernism's Impact on the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58:4 (1990), p. 658.

new ground in stating the meaning of a faith in, say, modern terms more successfully than a believer,"[35] a fact even admitted by Muslims in relation to Islam.[36]

(8) *In trying to understand religion even religionists have to resort to reduction in the sense of reducing the confusing variety of phenomena to a few determinable elements. Hence they practise the very reduction they accuse reductionists of practising.*

Obviously a distinction must be drawn here between reduction and reductionism.

Even in the context of reductionism rather than reduction, some religionists have argued that the problem with reductionism in religious studies is not its form but its nature. Huston Smith remarks, for instance, that "[s]everal times in this study we have inveighed against reductionism, but let us be clear. Its error does not lie in its attempt to understand one type of reality in terms of another. Virtually all explanation proceeds in this fashion, and explanation is needed, for true reality is never the most obvious; one might almost say that one of the ways truth betrays the fact that it is such is in the care it takes to remain elusive, if one may put the matter paradoxically. The mistake of reductionism – spirit reduced to metamorphosed matter (Darwinism), truth reduced to ideology (Marxism), psyche reduced to sex (Freud: there is no way 'to sweeten the sour apple') – lies in its attempt to explain the greater in terms of the less, with the not surprising consequence that the greater is thereby lessened."[37] More generally, however, the case against reductionism has been made on the ground that "the study of religion must be carried in a way appropriate to its subject matter. This is not a cry against reductionism, for any interpretation of symbolic life must reduce meanings to its scale and purposes. Rather, it is a reminder that social values and functions, which are never absent or irrelevant to symbolic action and belief, are themselves symbolic of the religious need to encounter what is sacred and to know what is true in order

35 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 44, note 26.
37 Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1976), p. 41.

to ground every aspect of life in what *really is*."[38] We shall revert to the point soon but not before clearing an important misunderstanding. Religious understanding does not always involve reduction; in fact it can be claimed that it employs integration rather than reduction. Eliade is emphatic on this point:

> One should strive to grasp the symbolic meaning of the religious facts in their heterogeneous, yet structurally interlocking appearances; such facts can be rites or ritual behavior as well as myths or legends or supernatural beings. Such a procedure does not imply the reduction of all meaning to a common denominator. One cannot insist strongly enough that the search for symbolic structures is not a work of reduction but of integration. We compare or contrast two expressions of a symbol not in order to reduce them to a single, pre-existent expression, but in order to discover the process whereby a structure is likely to assume enriched meanings. In studying the symbolism of flight and ascension we have given several examples of this process of enrichment; the reader who wants to verify the results obtained by such a methodological procedure is referred to that study.[39]

(9) *Religionists confuse the "real as sacred" with the existence of a sacred reality per se.*

It is true that, as a matter of *personal* belief, such might be the case. Huston Smith writes, for instance, in relation to the religions he wrote about in *The Religions of Man* that "it never occurred to me to doubt that the objects of their devotion exist."[40] The point cuts deeper, however, for Huston Smith says earlier on: "As phenomenologists of religion we neither affirm nor deny; we merely table the question as to whether the gods our students study exist. Our rationale for this move is that bracketing our beliefs enables us to enter more fully into their beliefs, but I am not confident that it works that way."[41] Such comments have led scientists and social scientists to the conclusion that religionists like Eliade not only describe the believer's reality but also endorse it. This is hardly the case as "what is sacred functions as what is real" for the believer, *not the non-believer*.

38 Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), p. 18.
39 Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 97.
40 Huston Smith, "Postmodernism's Impact on the Study of religion," *op. cit.*, p. 658.
41 *Ibid.*

Another argument has been offered inferentially by social scientists to arrive at the same conclusion on the basis of the following citation from Eliade:

> [A] religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied *as* something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred.[42]

From this statement Robert Segal draws the following two conclusions: (1) that because "his sole argument against those who seek to *explain* religion in psychological, political, economic, or other secular, not necessarily nonintellectual, terms is that they thereby ignore the irreducibly religious *meaning* of religion for believers themselves," Eliade "even contends that secular reductionists seek to explain the irreducibly religious meaning of religion nonreligiously *because* they ignore that meaning itself. *Eliade assumes* that a nonreligious *explanation* of the origin and function of religion presupposes a nonreligious *interpretation* of the meaning of religion"[43] and (2) further that "*[i]n opposing their explanations of religion, Eliade must be offering his own and* so must be giving more than an interpretation of religion. Eliade, I had concluded, thereby confuses interpretation with explanation – not because his explanation is, like his interpretation, irreducibly religious but because his sole justification for it is its accordance with his interpretation. The true explanation of religion, I had acknowledged, may turn out to be irreducibly religious, but it is not irreducibly religious simply because it tallies with an irreducibly religious interpretation of religion."[44]

Both assumptions seem uncalled for. The religious reality still lies with the believer. Eliade seems to be saying that all the explanations

42 Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.
43 Robert Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 142, emphasis added.
44 *Ibid.*, p. 143, emphasis added.

so far are non-religious in that they deny the real as *religiously* real, that the religiously real may not be real is an allied but different matter.

The understanding of the relationship between scale and phenomenon is crucial here. This has given currency to the celebrated adage: "The scale creates the phenomenon" and is cited as such by Eliade himself in a famous passage:

> Every religious experience is expressed and transmitted in a particular historical context. But admitting the historicity of religious experiences does not imply that they are reducible to non-religious forms of behavior. Stating that a religious datum is always a historical datum does not mean that it is reducible to a non-religious history – for example, to an economic, social, or political history. We must never lose sight of one of the fundamental principles of modern science: *the scale creates the phenomenon*... Henri Poincaré asked, not without irony, "Would a naturalist who had never studied the elephant except through the microscope consider that he had an adequate knowledge of the creature?" The microscope reveals the structure and mechanism of cells, which structure and mechanism are exactly the same in all multicellular organisms. The elephant is currently a multicellular organism, but is that all that it is? On the microscopic scale, we might hesitate to answer. On the scale of human vision, which at least has the advantage of presenting the elephant as a zoölogical phenomenon, there can be no doubt about the reply.[45]

The point of the passage apparently is that only by and at the level or scale of the sacred can sacred phenomena be discerned or weighed. To feel the full force of the insight we need to reverse the statement: the phenomenon creates the scale. The religious phenomenon can only be understood religiously because it alone generates the scale for assessing it. Our growth to adolescence provides a good example here. As a child one does not know what it means to be a grown-up. Then how does a child know that it has grown-up? The phenomenon of growing up has itself provided the scale for judging it, so that "when one reaches adulthood, one is, nevertheless, able to know that one has reached it, for one's understanding of adult maturity grows

[45] Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), pp. 7–8.

as one grows."[46] Once human beings become believers directly or vicariously, that phenomenon creates the scale of the sacred by which it may be understood.

III

It is quite possible that social scientists can similarly identify misconceptions that religionists have formed about the way social scientists study religion. This chapter has been written in the hope that once scholars in both the humanistic and the social-scientific camps discard the misconceptions each harbours of how the other studies religion, a richer and more fruitful dialogue between the two might ensue.

[46] John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

CHAPTER IX

Antireductionism and the Phenomenology of Religion

I

One of the most basic and persistent features of the phenomenology of religion may be identified as antireductionism. There are several ways in which this centrality of antireductionism to the phenomenology of religion could be established or demonstrated. One such way is by tracing the connection of the phenomenology of religion to philosophical phenomenology. To state the matter in a nutshell, the 'transcendental reduction' of Husserlian phenomenology is really an antireductionistic procedure[1] and this becomes even clearer in the following exposition of the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl:

> Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a 'descriptive psychology', or to return to the 'things themselves', is from the start a rejection of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological, or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-

[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?," in Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 18, 21–22.

> order expression. Science has not and never will have, by its nature, the same significance *qua* form of being as the world which we perceive, for the simple reason that it is a rationale or explanation of that world.[2]

Thus insofar as the phenomenology of religion may be lineally linked with philosophical phenomenology, although the exact nature of this link may be a matter of discussion,[3] it is clear that a prima facie case for the role of nonreductionism in the phenomenology of religion can be made.

Perhaps even more can be said. As mentioned earlier, Douglas Allen has identified antireductionism as one of the "five characteristics of philosophical phenomenology." Opposition to reductionism thns constitutes a direct connection with philosophical phenomenology, which becomes all the more apparent as this characteristic is explained:

> Antireductionism has been concerned with freeing us from uncritical preconceptions that prevent us from becoming aware of the specificity and diversity of phenomena, thus allowing us to broaden and deepen immediate experience and provide more accurate descriptions of this experience. Husserl, for example, attacked various forms of reductionism, such as 'psychologism', which attempted to derive the laws of logic from psychological laws and, more broadly, to reduce all phenomena to psychological phenomena. In opposing the oversimplifications of traditional empiricism and other forms of reductionism, phenomenologists aim to deal faithfully with phenomena as phenomena, and to become aware of what phenomena reveal in their full intentionality.[4]

The point, in fact, is capable of even further refinement. Phenomenologists of religion comprise a diverse group of scholars, who may not owe equal allegiance to all the five points listed earlier on page 73. Even after they have been run through this sieve, however, the commitment to antireductionism persists as a common feature

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

[3] Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 20, 179, 215; Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 223–224.

[4] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, pp. 274–275.

among them. Thus (although) "[o]f the five characteristics of phenomenological method listed above, intentionality and the *epoché*, though central, have not been universally accepted by phenomenologists. Almost all phenomenologists, however, have upheld a descriptive phenomenology that is antireductionist and that involves insight into essential structures."[5]

Leading phenomenologists of religion have been quite explicit on this point. Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950), after distinguishing the phenomenology of religion from (1) the poetry of religion; (2) the history of religion; (3) the psychology of religion; (4) the philosophy of religion; and (5) theology, states that "the perpetual task" of the phenomenology of religion "is to free itself from every non-phenomenological standpoint and to retain its own liberty."[6] The phenomenological standpoint included for van der Leeuw the willingness and ability: "to sympathize keenly and closely with experience other than one's own."[7] The point then is to guard against the tendency of reducing someone else's experience of himself or herself, to our own experience of this other person. In fact van der Leeuw even implicitly warns us against reducing yesterday's experience of something to what it seems like today, as against what it was in itself yesterday, even in our own lives!

In the study of religion, antireductionism assumes the form of empathy with the human subject of one's study as a historical compensation, one is tempted to say, for an earlier potentially reductionistic position according to which "the scholar was seen, ideally, as the detached academic intellect, surveying its material impersonally, almost majestically, and reporting on it objectively."[8] Gerardus van der Leeuw has sometimes been accused, both directly[9] and indirectly,[10] of not being able to maintain a clearly visible dividing line between phenomenology and theology, but the antireductionism of his phenomenological approach is not in doubt.[11]

5 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
6 Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, p. 688.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 675.
8 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither – and Why?," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 44.
9 Olof Pettersson and Hans Åkerberg, *Interpreting Religious Phenomena: Studies with Reference to The Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. Anders Dallby and Gunilla Florby (Stockholm: Almquest & Wiksell, 1981), p. 31.

The streak of antireductionism in the other prominent phenomenologist, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), is even more striking. Although sometimes reservations are expressed whether Mircea Eliade was a phenomenologist of religion, I believe the facts are on the side of Douglas Allen,[12] who clearly demonstrates Eliade's dissatisfaction with the reductionist approaches of the "scholars of 'the first period'" who utilised "certain assumed norms (rationalist, positivist, etc.)" and usually "forced their data into unilinear evolutionary schemes." Eliade also expresses his dissatisfaction with the scholars of "the second period," whom he criticised for "reducing the meaning of religious to its sociological or psychological analysis."[13] Douglas Allen goes on to say: "The upshot of Eliade's criticism may be expressed by the following antireductionist claim which we have frequently cited: the Historian of Religions must attempt to grasp the religious phenomena 'on their own plane of reference', as something religious. To reduce our interpretation of the religious phenomena to some other plane of reference (sociological, psychological, etc.) is to neglect their full intentionality and to fail to grasp their unique and irreducible 'element' – the sacred."[14] Like van der Leeuw, Eliade has also been accused, and very explicitly, for not drawing a clear line of separation between phenomenologist and nonphenomenologist approaches to the study of religion. Hans H. Penner points out that "[s]everal years later, Eliade was invited to write an essay on a survey of the history of religions over the past fifty years. One would expect, after reading the above assertion, that the essay would cover scholars of religion beginning with Rudolf Otto. The essay, in fact, begins with Durkheim and Freud, and includes Mauss, Gernet, Malinowski,

10 Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 278.
11 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
12 Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Direction* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), pp. 107–113.
13 See Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 19, 21.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Evans-Pritchard, and Parsons to name a few. Since none of these scholars are historians or phenomenologists of religion, why include them?"[15]

One of the several arguments for including them is that their studies, even though reductionistic, are helpful. Penner argues that "[t]he problem with Eliade's position, as well as similar approaches to the study of religion, is that they cannot have it both ways. Either religion is *sui generis* and entails a special hermeneutics for interpretation or it is not. If it is, then those who attempt to explain religion sociologically, or psychologically, may grasp a secondary feature of religion, but not its 'essential' meaning."[16] He goes on to say:

> The hierarchy of the branches of *Religionswissenschaft* from this point of view is clear. Durkheim and Freud did not just take one aspect of religion and lift it into a primary level. They were wrong in thinking that the secondary aspects of religion, the sociological and psychological, are *essential* to understanding the true essence of religion. What remains unexplainable is why historians and phenomenologists of religion continue to insist that sociology, anthropology and psychology remain "useful" for understanding religion.[17]

The argument has some force but one wonders if it is not possible for phenomenology of religion to be distinct, even if it is not separable from the other approaches? Penner cites Eliade to the effect that "[i]ndeed there is no such thing as a 'pure' religious fact. Such a fact is always *also* a historical, sociological, and psychological fact, to name only the most important contexts ... ."[18] Moreover, the fact that reductionist approaches to the study of religion may be useful in the nonreductionistic study of religion need not be that surprising, even though not of one piece with it. Hearing is a property of the ear, but is not the acoustics of the hall helpful or otherwise to hearing?

It is clear, therefore, despite the problems it might involve, that the phenomenology of religion is quintessentially nonreductionistic.

15 Hans H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 17.

16 *Ibid*., p. 17.

17 *Ibid*.

18 *Ibid*.

Even at the risk of some repetition this point needs to be restated, both because it constitutes the conclusion of this section and an introduction to the next. It is best stated in the words of Douglas Allen:

> *More than any other approach within the modern study of religion, phenomenology of religion has insisted that investigators approach religious data as phenomena that are fundamentally and irreducibly religious*. Otto, Eliade, and other phenomenologists of religion often defend their strong antireductionism by criticizing past reductionist approaches. Many of these past interpretations, for example, were based on 'positivist' and 'rationalist' norms and forced the religious data into preconceived unilinear, evolutionary explanatory frameworks. Phenomenologists have criticized the reductions of religious data to fit nonreligious perspectives, such as those of sociology, psychology, or economics. Such reductionisms, it is argued, destroy the specificity, complexity, and irreducible intentionality of religious phenomena. In attempting sympathetically to understand the experience of the other, the phenomenologist must respect the 'original' religious intentionality expressed in the data.[19]

II

So much for the theory. But what about the phenomenology of religion in practice?

It is well known that both philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion are not antireductionistic for their own sake. The aim of such antireductionism is to discover the 'essential whatness of structure embodied in the particular data'. This search for 'the invariant core which constitutes the essential meaning of the phenomena' is conducted in philosophical phenomenology through imaginary 'free association' which brings about the 'intuition of essences' (*Wesensschau*). However, the phenomenology of religion, "must substitute for Husserl's imaginary variation an actual variation of historical data."[20] If such be the case then must not phenomenology of religion either slip back into being an objective and purely

19 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," pp. 280–281, emphasis added.

20 *Ibid*., p. 275.

descriptive study[21] or turn into something of a subjective and speculative enterprise?[22] In either case it ceases to be what it claims to be – the first option remains beneath it, the second option goes beyond it.

If, however, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims, "the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world,"[23] then perhaps the situation is capable of being interpreted differently. The broad stream of Western thought prior to the rise of philosophical phenomenology found its focus, not merely in its epistemology but also in its ontology, either in idealism (which sides with the subject); or in realism (which sides with the object). Phenomenology stepped into this subject-object gap by emphasising their primal connection as constituting the core of experience. Viewed in this light, the phenomenology of religion seems to mediate between arid historical facts on the one hand and their reduction to categories of a very different order on the other. Two facts seem to confirm this observation: (1) that historical facts are treated as 'live' in some way as phenomenology tries to understand them and (2) contemporary anthropology, sociology etc. seek to gather facts, or at least include those facts in their data-base, which convey the self-understanding of the human subjects involved. Both points require elaboration.

In the study of religion one may distinguish between dead religions and living religions. The phenomenology of religions studies *both* of them nonreductionistically. This might seem a bit odd at first, if not bizarre, but perhaps the initial reservation might yield to eventual persuasion on the basis of certain considerations. The case of dead religions may be considered first. Our predicament here is both anticipated and perhaps even met by van der Leeuw, when he writes:

> Now when we are concerned, as in our own case, with the domain of historical research, this would appear to be the stage at which historical scepticism threateningly intrudes into our investigations, and renders all comprehension of remote times and regions impossible to us. We might then reply that we are quite ready to acknowledge that we can *know*

[21] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 249.
[23] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

> nothing, and that we admit, further, that perhaps we understand very little; but that, on the other hand, to understand the Egyptian of the first dynasty is, in itself, no more difficult than to understand my nearest neighbour. Certainly the monuments of the first dynasty are intelligible only with great difficulty, but as an expression, as a human statement, they are no harder than my colleague's letters. In this respect, indeed, the historian can learn from the psychiatrist: "If we are astonished by an ancient myth or an Egyptian head, and confront it with the conviction that there is something that is intelligible in accord with our own experience, although it is infinitely remote from us and unattainable, just as we are amazed by a psycho-pathological process or an abnormal character, we have at least the possibility of a more deeply comprehending glance, and perhaps of achieving a living representation."[24]

What is achieved by an act of imagination in the context of dead religions may be achieved by an act of consultation in the context of the living ones. The nonreductionist axiom, we need to remind ourselves, is the intentionality of the subject: that the believer is always right, dead or alive. In enunciating the nonreductionistic principle, that "[i]f we really want to understand religion, we must refer to the believer's testimony," Kristensen, like van der Leeuw, was speaking in the context of dead religions, as has been pointed out by Eric J. Sharpe:

> It is perhaps necessary to emphasise in this context that Kristensen was writing about the scholar's interpretation of the religions of the past, rather than the dialogician's interpretation of the religions of the present. But the principle is an important one. If it is true, as Kristensen claims, that we can never experience someone else's religious tradition as the believer experiences it (a point of view with which it is difficult to argue), what then is left for the phenomenologist of religion, other than tamely to acknowledge that 'the believer is always right' – even though the believer may on an occasion appear to have been disastrously wrong?[25]

The conclusion, however, seems to be rather severe and capable of revision in the light of the thoughts of Wilfred Cantwell Smith on the matter. Professor Smith is a *historian* of religion rather than a

[24] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 676–677.
[25] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

phenomenologist and this makes the case all the more significant, for it could indicate how the nonreductionism cultivated by the phenomenology of religion may also have affected the *history* of religion. Smith lays down the proposition: "That no statement is valid nnless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers."[26] Lest his position be considered too simplistic, his explanation of his position needs to be carefully examined:

> I know that this is revolutionary, and I know that it will not be readily conceded; but I believe it to be profoundly true and important. It would take a good deal more space than is here available to defend it at length; for I am conscious of many ways in which it can be misunderstood and of many objections that can be brought against it which can be answered only at some length. I will only recall that by "religion" here I mean as previously indicated the faith in men's hearts. On the external data about religion, of course, an outsider can by diligent scholarship discover things that an insider does not know and may not be willing to accept. But about the meaning that the system has for those of faith, an outsider cannot in the nature of the case go beyond the believer; for their piety *is* the faith, and if they cannot recognize this portrayal, then it is not their faith that he is portraying. There are complications regarding historical change; I recognize that a religion develops, whereas few believers do recognize this, so that what once was true about it may no longer be so, and *the insider can speak authoritatively only for the present*. There are other complications too. All of these must be taken into account in any final exposition; some of them have been explored, others need further clarification. But on the fundamental point I have no qualms: I would hold emphatically that fruitful study must recognize this principle. Indeed, it is not really a limitation but a creative principle; for it provides experimental control that can lead a student dynamically towards the truth.[27]

We cannot pursue all the implications of his testimony, at least not here, at least for now, bnt I wonld like to draw attention to the point where I have supplied emphasis in the original. The point of doing so is that Smith is advocating the phenomenological approach with its emphasis on nonreductionism to the study of *living* religions

[26] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43, emphasis added.

the way Kristensen and van der Leeuw did for the dead. It must also be pointed out that while Smith believes "that no statement about a religion is valid" – *in the present* – "unless it can be acknowledged by the religion's believers," he does *not* hold the reverse to be true. In fact he is quite emphatic as noted earlier: "The reverse is *not* true. Not every statement about Islam that is acceptable to Muslims is *ipso facto* true: one can flatter or beguile."[28] In this matter even Kristensen was not as naive as might appear to be the case at first sight.[29]

Smith also makes it quite clear that Kristensen's nonreductionistic criterion need not be as stultifying as appears at first sight; in fact it is capable of a very creative application:

> Nor need outsiders simply follow Muslims: It is possible both in theory and in practice for an outside scholar to break new ground in stating the meaning of a faith in, say, modern terms more successfully than a believer. At the present time, for instance, Muslims themselves have not been able to give an intellectual statement of their faith that succeeds well in communicating meaning to a Western audience. The task of a non-Muslim scholar writing about Islam is that of constructing an exposition that will do justice to the Western academic tradition, by growing directly out of the objective evidence and by being rationally coherent both within itself and with all other knowledge, and at the same time will do justice to the faith in men's hearts by commanding their assent once it is formulated. It is a creative task and a challenging one.[30]

It will still remain true, though, as Kristensen said, that there is a "distance between him [historian] and the object of his research, he cannot identify with it as the believer does. We cannot become Mohammedans when we try to understand Islam, and if we could our study would be at an end: we should ourselves then directly experience the reality."[31] Kristensen said that the historian cannot identify himself with Islam as the believer does; Smith is saying that he can, however, identify himself with the believer. If there is irony

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 43, emphasis added.
[29] W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1960), p. 460.
[30] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–44.
[31] W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

in the fact that Kristensen as a phenomenologist is making a 'historian's' statement and Smith as a 'historian' is making a phenomenological statement, then I for one would like to think that it's a delectable irony!

CHAPTER X

Some Applications of the Phenomenological Method

To one holding a hammer, it has been said, every object appears as a nail. Such a statement, in the present context, obviously contains a warning against the over-application of a method; the excessive, even obsessive, use of any one method such as the phenomenological. It has also been said, by a person this time rather than of him, that he was looking for his lost spectacles under the lamp, not because they were lost there but because that's where the light was. Such a statement, in the present context, is obviously a warning against the misapplication of the method by allowing the method, such as the phenomenological, to determine the choice of our object of study just because the method can be applied to it, rather than it being chosen for its intrinsic value. It has also been said, however, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. This statement, by contrast to the excessive application or the misapplication of a method, points to an opposite danger – that of not applying the method at all, in order to assess its actual merit. The rest of this chapter is an attempt to address the issue of the actual application of the method in five spheres: (a) the typological; (b) the historical; (c) the symbolic; (d) the mystical; and (e) the spiritual. The last section (f) contains a new proposal in relation to the application of the method.

A. Typological: Inspiration

The word inspiration literally refers to the act of inhalation involved in breathing, but its literal sense has been virtually supplanted by the metaphorical, in which any association of inspiration with breathing will have to be with "the breath of God." A semantic and historical description of the term will help locate its meaning and role more precisely in the study of religion. "Taken in its general sense, the

term refers to a form of religious experience that is widely distributed and found in a great variety of forms. Taken more narrowly, the actual term (which derives from the Latin *inspirare*, 'to blow or breathe upon') implies the existence of a *spiritus* or 'breath', that is breathed into the soul and enlivens it."[1]

Inspiration can be related to a cluster of several allied words, namely: ecstasy, prophecy, enthusiasm, frenzy, imagination, possession, oracles, charisma, experience, and revelation. The view that inspiration is a form of ecstasy, that is, a state in which one stands *outside* oneself to come in contact with some divine truth, may be traced to Plato *(Timæs*, 71) but the idea implied in inspiration is rather the opposite – of the infusion of the divine in oneself.[2] Prophecy, in its biblical sense of a human medium speaking for the Spirit, stands closer to inspiration. In this sense prophecy is the utterance, inspiration the medium, and the Spirit or God the speaker. The word inspiration, however, though inclusive of prophecy, is not confined to it. Enthusiasm is a cognate of inspiration but possesses connotations of excess not associated with inspiration and, unlike the word inspiration, could also possess a negative connotation. The term frenzy similarly implies a degree of violence not associated with inspiration; moreover, seizure is more associated with spirit-possession, and inspiration with being possessed by the Spirit, though perhaps "divine madness" could still be associated with inspiration, if only with a slender thread. The world of imagination, like that of religion, constitntes another realm where inspiration operates but then it stands for the capacity to move the intellect and emotions, often without the context of a transcendental referent often involved in religious usage. Yet one might refer to the Bible, or to a sacred text of religions other than Christianity, as inspired in its literary rather than theological signification. Religious texts could be referred to as inspired in this literary or aesthetic sense, as when it is said that "the

1 David Carpenter, "Inspiration," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 7, p. 256.

2 Plato elsewhere, in the *Phaedrus* (265 a–b) distinguishes four different types of inspiration: "besides the poetic mania of the Muses there are also prophetic, telestic (ritual), and erotic forms of inspiration (Epipnoia)" (*ibid.*, p. 257).

Song of Songs is instinct with at least the highest *poetic* inspiration,"[3] but literary texts could not be considered inspired in the theological sense. Possession is a term which has increasingly come to indicate the invasion of the body by another spirit rather than the suffusion of the psyche by the Spirit as implied in inspiration, and the word is fast acquiring an anthropological rather than a theological orientation. Oracles can conceivably be uttered under divine inspiration but their telegraphic brevity and their historical association with the Graeco-Roman and primal religions attenuates their link with inspiration as a general category. The association of the word inspiration is biblical and then, by analogy, capable of extension to the scriptures of the other major religious traditions. In the biblical context, inspiration involves the operation of the Holy Spirit. As "charisma is the name usually given to the action of the Spirit in the economy of salvation,"[4] inspiration could also be seen as possessing a charismatic aspect. Experience enters into the discussion of inspiration here in a rather obvious way: not only has inspiration to be experienced by its medium, the reader or listener should share the experience of being moved by that which is inspired. There is, however, another rather different approach through which experience becomes relevant in the context of inspiration. Some religions, and Buddhism is the prime example here, may emphasise experience over inspiration (= revelation). Or, alternatively, elements within them may be considered inspired only in the sense that they are meant to move the followers on a path of salvific conduct rather than to faith or belief.[5] The following morally inspired utterance is attributed to the Bnddha: "One must not accept uny law from reverence, but first try it as gold is tried by fire."[6] However, even in Buddhism the claim to virtually inspired infallibility did not fail to emerge, for

3 James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), Vol. VII, p. 349.

4 Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), p. 720.

5 Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1974), passim.

6 S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1951), Vol. I, p. 611.

it is declared in the *Divyāvadāna*. "The sky will fall with the moon and stars, earth with its mountains and forests will ascend, oceans will be dried up, but the Buddhas speak not wrongly."[7] But perhaps this is a case of literary inspiration – of the Muses rather than Moses. It must now be recognised that the Delphic oracle among the Greeks, the inspired utterances of Shamans, or, in another sense of the Buddha notwithstanding, "for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the idea of inspiration has been largely (though not exclusively) connected with the sacred books of these religions."[8] Thus in final analysis "inspiration can be more precisely defined as verbal revelation."[9] Although one should avoid equating the two as will be indicated later, it should be noted that almost all major religious traditions distinguish some form of verbal revelation from other forms of religious literature. The examples from Judaism and Christianity are well known. Hinduism distinguishes between *Śruti* or verbal revelation, and other works, which are not so revealed and are called *Smṛti* or tradition. Islam distinguishes even the literal words of God as contained in the Qur'ān, from Ḥadīth Qudsī, or those sayings of the Prophet which are attributed to God but which do not represent verbal revelation of God in the sense the Qur'ān is. Even in Confucianism, the "five classics" (*Wu Ching*) are distinguished from the "four books" (*Ssu Shu*) and in Mahāyāna Buddhism distinction is drawn between *Sūtras* which "claim to be the sayings of the Buddha himself" and a *Śāstra*, which is "a treatise written by a known person," even though there are problems associated with extending the term inspiration in the sense of verbal revelation to these traditions.

The term inspiration, then, may be properly described as the experience of a possession by the divine in a state characterised by a passive reception, which typically involves communication from that divine source. But while revelation refers to the word, inspiration has reference to the recipient of the word, so that while one may speak of the word becoming flesh in Jesus, one would refer to his ministry as one in which "the inspiration of Jesus was continuous

[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1972), Vol. 12, p. 319.
[9] Karl Rahner, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 720.

and perfect."[10] For inspiration "is a condition of the soul in relation to God."[11] Thus one may admit of degrees of inspiration, along with types of inspiration, as already indicated in the distinction between literary and religious inspiration. Moreover, when inspiration is taken to "mean that the prophet completely loses his individuality, the infallibility of God has been attributed to scripture as well – a position that has occasioned much controversy among both Jews and Christians since the 18th century"[12] but has the status of dogma in Islam.

The foregoing analysis may now be supplemented with historical materials. The Bible uses the expression "inspired of God" itself (2 Tim. 3.16) in relation to Scripture and acknowledges the existence of inspiration prior to it (Heb. 1.1–3). The early fathers also accept the idea[13] but the first explicit use by the Church of the term inspiration is to be found in the decree of the Council of Florence for the Jacobites (1441), whose special significance derives from the fact that it not only asserts divine authorship of the scriptures as before, but 'explicitly assigns inspiration as the mode by which it exercises itself.'[14] Human beings thus become the instrument through which God speaks by the process of inspiration. The Roman Catholic doctrine in this regard assumes the form of the verbal inspiration of scripture and its inerrancy, with the proviso that although inspiration extends to all the books and to parts thereof, it may not extend to all *things* and only to matters of faith and morals, a position strikingly similar to the Hindu Vedantic position regarding the Vedas,[15] with the difference that God in the Vedānta is not the author but merely the promulgator of scripture.[16]

Protestant doctrine, influenced by the tradition of critical textual scholarship around the Bible, is not committed to any "*a priori*

[10] James Hastings, ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, p. 349.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 347.
[12] *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1972), Vol. 12, p. 319.
[13] Karl Rahner, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 720–721.
[14] See John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (third edition) (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983), p. 61.
[15] M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1956), pp. 44, 140.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

theory of the inspiration of the Bible," but would admit theologically of degrees of inspiration, so that the distinction between an ordinary Christian who leads a life inspired by God and the apostles, "is one of degree rather than of kind. The inspiration of an apostle should be conceived as that of a common Christian raised to a higher power in proportion to his clearer vision of Christ, his closer fellowship with Christ, and his deeper devotion to Christ."[17] Nevertheless, it is precisely the association of inspiration with verbal revelation which enables one to use inspiration, not merely as a Christian concept, but as a category in the History of Religions. For instance, the Hindus would consider the Vedas inspired in this sense, that "God makes the Vedic propositions flash in the minds of the sages in the same linguistic form in which they are now available."[18]

Religious traditions differ in the way they categorise and rank inspiration, as, for instance, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. "This is made clear by the role ascribed to inspiration in the constitution of the Scriptures of these three religions. While affirming the supreme authority of the Torah, the rabbis denied that it was inspired. Rather it was given directly to Moses by God verbatim. The intervention of an inspired author would have served only to weaken its authority. Only the Prophets and the writings could properly be described as inspired."[19] The situation within Islam is somewhat similar, wherein "a clear distinction is drawn between *wahy*, which is applied to the verbatim transmission of the Qur'ān to Muḥammad through the angel Gabriel, and inspiration (*ilhām*), which is restricted to the inspiration of individuals on matters that are of primarily personal concern."[20] However, in the case of Christianity, by contrast, "it is precisely the concept of inspiration that is traditionally invoked to account for the authoritativeness of Scripture."[21] Complication is thus introduced by the fact that if you ask the

[17] James Hastings, ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, p. 349.

[18] K. Satchidananda Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 50.

[19] David Carpenter, "Inspiration," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 7, p. 258.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

question: How do believers know the will of God, the "followers in any revealed religion (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), will tell you that God has spoken, has been made manifest, has communicated with people,"[22] but in ways that might seem different. In Christianity, for instance, "revelation is linked to complicated and sometimes emotional issues like inspiration,"[23] which is a "very complex problem both theologically and practically. Almost every Christian group has its own history of understanding and explaining it."[24]

In the above examples the Judaic tradition distinguished between degrees of inspiration on the basis of the *content* of the revelation resulting from the inspiration and the Islamic tradition distinguished on the basis of the *mode* of reception of the revelation, received through inspiration. It is of further interest to consider, alongside this, a distinction the Hindu tradition draws between parts of its corpus of revelation – the Vedas. It is divided on the question of whether the early or the later portions are to be accorded primacy – the school of Pūrva-Mīmāṁsā opting for the former, which emphasise ritual, and that of Uttara-Mīmāṁsā, also known as Vedānta, opting for the latter, which emphasise knowledge. To a certain extent the situation is analogous with the Christian Bible the whole of which is considered inspired but in which, for the Christians, the New Testament has primacy as compared with the Old. This is explained, at least by one writer in terms of inspiration. "While the divine power which seized the Old Testament Prophets was intermittent, and even that which worked in the apostles was not without breaks and flaws, the inspiration of Jesus was continuous and perfect. He is the incarnate word, and no part of the Bible can be profitably used as a rule of faith and life until it proves itself to be in harmony with His mind and will."[25]

The results of this survey may be set forth in the form of the following typology. Inspiration could be classified as Primal, Literal, Verbal, Natural, and Moral. Primal inspiration may be connected

[22] Mary Jo Weaver (with David Brakke and Jason Bivins), *Introduction to Christianity* (third edition) (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), p. 3.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 19, note 2.

[25] James Hastings, ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, pp. 349–350.

with the phenomena of oracles in its traditional sense. Literal inspiration is best exemplified by Islam, wherein God's words are literally received. Verbal inspiration is exemplified by the Judeo-Christian tradition; Natural inspiration by the school of Hinduism known as Mīmāṁsā, which upholds the doctrine of a revelation without a revealing God and regards revelation as part and parcel of the natural process, as it were. Moral inspiration is best exemplified by Buddhism and Confucianism, which are essentially non-theistic in the conventional sense and yet possess scriptures which may be considered at least inspiring if not inspired. The examples utilised to illustrate the typology are suggestive, not exhaustive, and it may be possible to acknowledge inspiration of different kinds in the same religious tradition. The Sāṅkhya school, the Nyāya school and the Mīmāṁsā school of philosophy in Hinduism, for instance, respectively exemplify moral, verbal, and natural kinds of inspiration.

B. Historical: Egyptian and Mesopotamian Religions

J. G. Arapura has employed the phenomenological method as an epistemological modality for understanding the history of religions, in terms of the spheres of the spirit. His analysis, however, is carried out in the context of living religions. This section is an attempt to see if his typology, based on a comparative phenomenology of religion, can also be extended to the extinct religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

I

Mircea Eliade described the current state of affairs in the History of Religions as follows: "At present, historians of religion are divided between two divergent but complementary methodological orientations. One group concentrates primarily on the characteristic *structures* of religious phenomena, the other chooses to investigate their *historical context*. The former seeks to understand *the essence of religion*, the latter to discover and communicate its *history*."[26] These are broadly referred to as the phenomenological and historical methods in the study of religion. Seen in this background, J. G. Arapura breaks new ground, when, in his book *Religion as Anxiety and Tranquillity*[27] he applies the phenomenological method to the religious history of mankind as a whole. The book is subtitled: *An Essay in Comparative Phenomenology of the Spirit*.[28] "The word which is central to the book is phenomenology."[29] The word defines the method, which leads to the realisation that "the phenomenology of religion cannot be really developed without resort to a *comparative* phenomenology of religion, which in turn will require the study of existential consciousness."[30] When such a study of existential consciousness in the history of religions is carried out, two separate spheres of the spirit can be identified. The spheres of the spirit are "something under and no less concrete than the religions ... which by their very nature are removed from conscious self-estimation as religions ... Even so, these spheres of the spirit will be tethered in our scheme to religions or families of religions which alone constitute their self-identifying and self-preserving nuclei."[31] "These spheres of the spirit are expressed as moods, attitudes, orientations in thought, art, etc., which seem to clearly persist even after, as is sometimes the case, the nuclei themselves have reached the point of near-disintegration or have become all but invisible."[32] Hence the choice of the expression "spheres of the spirit" over religion may be necessary but is confessedly "not a happy one."[33]

This identification of the "spheres of the spirit," according to Arapura as already noted, "is not a discovery which has come about as a result of some metaphysical inquiry, which we totally bypass, but of a very much more modest epistemological activity."[34] The outcome of this epistemological activity is the identification of two

[26] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), p. 232.

[27] J. G. Arapura, *Religion in Anxiety and Tranquillity: An Essay in Comparative Phenomenology of the Spirit* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1972).

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

such spheres among the religions of the world, each representing what is called the *anxiety type* and the *tranquillity type* of consciousness and which are broadly associated with the Semitic and the Indic religious tradition. J. G. Arapura writes:

> The words 'anxiety' and 'tranquillity' are here used to represent the two different types of consciousness expressed in two separate spheres of the spirit. In both cases the ultimate religious sources of insight have been decisive in shaping the consciousness. When we pass from the primeval forms of religion to the historic religions of revelation great events and great images look large over the horizon, irrespective of whether such passage constitutes progress or regress.
>
> The sense of the wrongness of existence continues to call for symbolic and ritual structures of rectification, no doubt, but also call for much more: for radical new beginnings, what Walter Otto describes as renewal from the very roots.
>
> Anxiety can be detected as a fundamental element in Western spirituality, and indisputably it has its sources in Christianity itself as the Pauline writings above all will abundantly testify. It is related to the particular understanding of the cause of the world's predicament, but also to the end to which history moves. As St. Paul writes, 'for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body'. The Christian expression of the spiritual life is definitely related to the eschaton and to its delay, to the expectation, anguish and relief involved in them. The particular expression of Christianity-determined Western consciousness is inalienable from this source.
>
> In the Indian spiritual sphere determined by the Veda, Vedanta and Buddhism, whereas anxiety has always been recognized as the source of all human striving, most of all in religion, Reality begins where anxiety is terminated. It has been the belief that anxiety itself is the denial of Reality, since it is the character of the phenomenal world of becoming, to be both contained within its bounds, false as they are, and eventually burnt up along with that world. Anxiety must be totally forbidden to distort and pervert man's perception of Reality, which can mediate itself only in modes of tranquillity.[35]

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77. For a similar difference in the *symbolic* expressions of these two spheres see David W. McKain, ed., *Christianity: Some Non-Christian Appraisals* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1964), pp. 114–115.

It will be noticed that this comparative phenomenology of religion has been developed by Arapura on the basis of the *living* religions of the world. It now remains for us to examine whether such a phenomenology can be applied to the extinct religions of the world as well.

II

The religions of ancient Egypt[36] and ancient Mesopotamia belong to the category of extinct religions. However, historical research has enabled scholars to reconstruct these religions, both in substance and spirit. These scholars have been struck by the fact that ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions seem to represent what we might call different spheres of the spirit. Brevard S. Childs, on the basis of his study of Sumerian and Babylonian myths as well as those of Egypt, points out that in Sumerian creation myths, "the existence of the earth is derived from chaos. A creation is not taken for granted, but is connected with the primeval struggle for victory."[37] This seems to represent Anxiety as does the Babylonian creation epic, the Enuma Elish, in which "the Babylonian impression of life as an existence of uncertainty and threatened danger is reflected."[38] On the other hand, Childs notes of Egypt:

> Egyptian culture has been stamped in every respect by the character of the land. The burning sun in its monotonous circuit and the annual flood of the Nile with its lifegiving mud were the realities which dominated its life. Because of these invariables the Egyptian conceived of his world as the centre of a static order of being. It is therefore natural that the 'truth' of this concept of life should have exercised a strong influence in the formation of the myth.[39]

The mythical symbolism of Mesopotamia and Egypt can thus be interpreted as representing a comparative phenomenology of the spirit as it were. B. W. Anderson observes, for instance, that

[36] See C. J. Bleeker, *The Rainbow: A Collection of Studies in the Science of Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 106–127, especially see pp. 120–121.

[37] Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), p. 25.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[i]n contrast to Mesopotamia, where the fury of the thunderstorm and the turbulence of the great rivers at spring flood reminded men of the precariousness of their existence, the religion of Egypt was dominated by a serene sense of the orderly cosmos as evidenced in the daily circuit of the sun, the rhythm of the seasons, and the fertilizing of the earth by the annually overflowing Nile. The "cosmic gods" who manifested themselves in the benevolent powers of nature were praised as the source of the order and stability of the universe.[40]

H. and H. A. Frankfort have further shown how "[w]ithin the mythopoeic thought a great variety of attitudes and outlooks are possible; and contrast as well as variety become apparent when we compare the speculative myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is true that the same images are often used to describe them. Yet the mood of the myths and the significance of the images are most unlike."[41] Thus it is pointed out that though both Egyptian and Mesopotamian myths represent the existing world as emerging from the waters of chaos, these waters are passive in the Egyptian myths but turbulent in the Mesopotamian. The earth was male in Egypt and female in Mesopotamia and was associated with fertility in Mesopotamia, while in Egypt "the dead entered here to be born as immortals."[42] H. and H. A. Frankfort go on to say:

The differences which we have enumerated do not merely represent a meaningless variety of images; they betray a thorough contrast between the Egyptian and Mesopotamian views as to the nature of the universe in which man lives. Throughout the Mesopotamian texts we hear overtones of anxiety which seem to express a haunting fear that the unaccountable and turbulent powers may at any time bring disaster to human society. But in Egypt the gods were powerful without being violent. Nature presented itself as an established order in which changes were either superficial and insignificant or an unfolding in time of what had been preordained from the beginning. Moreover, Egyptian kingship guaranteed stability to society. For, as Dr. Wilson explained, one of the gods occupied the throne. Thus Pharaoh was divine, the son and image

40 Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos* (New York: Association Press, 1967), pp. 43–44.

41 H. and H. A. Frankfort, et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 364–365.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 365.

of the Creator. Thus Pharaoh insured a harmonious integration of nature and society at all times. But in Mesopotamia the assembly of the gods assigned a mere mortal to rule men, and the divine favor might at any time be withdrawn from him. Man was at the mercy of decisions he could neither influence nor gauge. Hence the king and his counsellors watched for portents on earth and in the sky which might reveal a changing constellation of divine grace, so that catastrophe might he foreseen and possibly averted. In Egypt neither astrology nor prophecy ever developed to any great extent.[43]

The studies of S. G. F. Brandon further tend to confirm these views. He writes:

The two earliest civilised states, namely in Egypt and Mesopotamia, provide the earliest written evidence of cosmogonic thought. It is impossible to determine which has the older record: the surviving texts in each instance date from about the middle of the third millennium B.C. and probably derive from still earlier traditions. These cosmogonies, although they are thus contemporaneous and come from sister civilisations in the ancient Near East, are, however, very different in their fundamental conceptions.[44]

The working of Tranquillity and Anxiety can be seen not only aetiologically but also soteriologically in the light of S. G. F. Brandon's work. In the religion of Egypt, "the Egyptian could look forward with some measure of confidence to a *post-mortem* existence of eternal beatitude."[45] Thus salvation is a state in which time has lost its terror, for life after death was an extension of life here. This

43 *Ibid.*, p. 366: "The contrast between the temper of the two countries was concisely expressed in their creation myths. In Egypt creation was viewed as the brilliant act of an omnipotent Creator disposing of submissive elements. Of the lasting order which he created, society formed an unchanging part. In Mesopotamia the Creator had been chosen by a divine assembly helpless before the threat of the power of chaos. Their champion, Marduk, had followed up his victory over these antagonists by the creation of the universe. This took place almost as an afterthought, and man was especially designed as a servant of the gods. There was no permanence in the human sphere. The gods assembled on every New Year's Day to 'establish such destinies' for mankind as they pleased."

44 S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), p. 14.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

conquest of time is typical of the Tranquillity-Type sphere of the spirit. On the other hand, the "Mesopotamian contemplated beyond death only the hopeless doom of the 'land of no-return,'"[46] an attitude more consistent with the Anxiety-Type sphere of the spirit. Even after the development of salvation myths the distinction persisted. In Egypt "the motif of the assimilation of the deceased to Osiris"[47] emerged:

> There is some evidence in the sister civilization of Mesopotamia of the practice of ritual assimilation in the cult of Tammuz. The nature of Mesopotamian eschatology, however, precluded this deity's becoming a saviour-god in the sense in which Osiris was, namely, as one who could provide *post-mortem* salvation for his devotees. Consequently, although substitution rituals existed based upon assimilation to Tammuz, the salvation obtained was from sickness in this life, not eternal well-being after death. Although the death and resurrection of a deity was apparently ritually represented in the cults of Adonis and Attis, there does not seem to have been in these cults any effective assimilation of devotees, living or dead, with these deities in their deaths and resurrections. The *dromena* of the Eleusinian Mysteries might seem to afford a better example of ritual assimilation with soteriological intent. Unfortunately, despite the research of several generations of scholars, we are still uncertain of the nature of these *dromena*. It would seem likely that they included some representation of Demeter's search for her lost daughter and the subsequent reunion of the two goddesses, and it would also seem probable that by participation in such representation the *mystae* were given a sense of communion with Demeter in both her sorrow and her exultation; but it would appear doubtful whether such ritual action and its effects were being described by Themistios when he wrote: 'The soul [at the point of death] has the same experience as those who are initiated into the great mysteries ...'. Participation in the rites must surely have given a sense of spiritual comfort and exaltation; however, so far as can be known, the *dromena* at Eleusis did not relate to a death and resurrection *mythos* of immediate personal significance as did that concerning Osiris.[48]

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *The Saviour God* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), p. 28.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

III

To conclude: J. G. Arapura's typology of the Anxiety-Type and Tranquillity-Type spheres of the spirit seems to be capable of extension to the religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia on the basis of mythopoeic[49] evidence from these two religions.

C: Symbolic: The *Śiva-Liṅga*

I

Theistic worship in Hinduism centres, in the main, around two gods: Viṣṇu and Śiva. Out of these two gods, Śiva is represented by a symbol commonly known as the *liṅga*. The word, in this context, denotes an object, conical in shape, which can come in many sizes, ranging all the way from as small as a rounded stone found in river beds to as large as a column, or even a mountain.

In most of the religious literature either on the *liṅga* in particular, or Hinduism in general, the *Śiva-liṅga* is referred to as a phallic symbol. The following extracts are offered in support of the statement.

(1) "Shiva is regularly represented by the *liṅga*, and often united with *yoni*, male and female *organs*."[50]

(2) "The *fertility* aspect of the *liṅga* belongs to the period of epics and Purāṇas, and, evident during the development of Śaivism. Thus the *liṅga*, as the symbol of transcendent power, is the central conception of Śaiva philosophy. Śiva is represented in beautifully sculptured forms as well as by the symbolic *liṅga*, which may be a stone pillar, a natural white stone (*bāṇa liṅga*), a mountain (like Tiruvannamalai) or any similar aniconic form (*niṣkala*)."[51]

[49] As distinguished from a distinction based on (theological) philosophical or psychological grounds between these ancient religions, the grounds on which Arapura mainly predicates the distinction among the existing religions (*ibid.*, pp. 83–110).

[50] John R. Hinnells and Eric J. Sharpe, eds., *Hinduism* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Oriel Press Ltd., 1972), p. 59, emphasis added.

[51] Margaret and James Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism: Its Mythology, Folklore and Development 1500 B.C.–A.D. 1500* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 162.

(3) "But Śiva was and still is chiefly worshipped in the form of the *liṅga*, usually a short cylindrical pillar with rounded top, which is the survival of a cult older than Indian civilization itself. *Phalli* have been found in the Harappā remains. Early Tamil literature refers to the setting up of ritual posts, which seem to have been *phallic* emblems. The cult of the liga, at all times followed by some of the non-Āryan peoples, was incorporated into Hinduism around the beginning of the Christian era, though at first it was not very important. As early as the *Ṛg Veda*, Rudra, the mountain god, was connected with plants and animals. The horned *ithyphallic* god of Mohenjo Daro, surrounded by animals, may well be the prototype of Śiva, as the patron of reproduction in men, animals and plants. In this form he is known as *paśupati* ("Lord of Beasts") and is often represented in South India as a four armed man, with one hand in an attitude of blessing, the second open, as though bestowing a boon, an axe in the third, and a small deer springing from the fingers of the fourth."[52]

When one turns to books on Śaivism itself the situation is no different. One of the best known books on Śiva contains the following entry in the glossary:

Liṅga (sometimes *lingam*): the phallus, particularly of Śiva.[53]

In sum, then, according to the historical, and indeed virtually all other methods in the study of religion, the *Śivaliṅga* is a phallic symbol.[54]

The unfailing association of the *liṅga* with the phallus, however, even as a statement of *historical* fact has been called into question. The well-known Indian historian, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, has addressed the issue in a passage which is quoted in extenso, as it bears directly on the issue on hand.

[52] A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (third revised edition) (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1967), p. 308, emphasis added.

[53] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 324.

[54] *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (editor in chief, Mircea Eliade; New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987; sixteen volumes) directs the reader to "[s]ee also phallus" under the indexed item *liṅga* (Vol. 16, p. 308) and describes the "small stone phallic objects" found at Indus Valley sites as prefiguring "the later veneration of the *liṅga* (phallus) in the worship of Śiva" (Vol. 6, p. 337).

Is Śivaliṅga a Phallic Symbol?

Is the *Śivaliṅga* a phallus? The discovery of phallic cult objects here and there, bearing evidence of the worship of the phallus among prehistoric tribes, has led to the easy assumption that the *Śivaliṅga* was phallic in its origin. And the preponderance, real or supposed, of orgiastic rites in some forms of Śāktism has doubtless sometimes influenced modern students of Śaivism into accepting an exclusively phallic interpretation of the *Śivaliṅga*. But the *liṅga* may have been in origin no more than just a symbol of Śiva, as the *śālagrāma* is of Viṣṇu. The worship of the *liṅga* as a symbol once started, there was little to prevent a confusion in the popular mind between this and the cult of the phallus, and legends came to be invented of the origin of the worship of the *liṅga* as the phallus of Śiva. In some such way we can explain the passages – not many after all, and rather late in the *Mahābhārata* and other works –, which lend colour to the phallic interpretation of the *Śivaliṅga*. 'Of all the representations of the deity which India has imagined,' observes Barth, 'these (*liṅgas*) are perhaps the least offensive to look at. Anyhow, they are the least materialistic; and if the common people make fetishes of them, it is nevertheless true that the choice of these symbols by themselves to the exclusion of every other image was, on the part of certain founders of sects, such as Basava, a sort of protest against idolatry'. The Pallava Mahendravarman who set up a *liṅga* in Tiruchirappalli (Trichinopoly), centuries before Basava's time, gave unmistakable expression to the very same idea.[55]

Note that the phallic association is being questioned here, in the course of a historical sketch of Śaivism, on *historical* grounds. This historical approach should be carefully distinguished from the phenomenological approach, which also questions the phallic association of the *Śiva-liṅga* but on phenomenological grounds, in the section which follows this one. As we move into it, the reader needs to be reminded that the dissenting view of Sastri has few takers in mainstream Indological scholarship, wherein the *liṅga* is regularly described as a phallic symbol.

[55] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, "An Historical Sketch of Śaivism," in Haridas Bhattacharyya, ed., *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1956), Vol. IV, pp. 67–68.

I

How is this conclusion affected when the phenomenological method is applied to this piece of data?

One key element in the phenomenological method consists of looking at the data from the *point of view of the believer*. This perspective constitutes an important ingredient of the phenomenological method, which "investigates what the believer believes himself rather than what others believe about him."[56] So the question arises: does the believer look upon the *liṅga* as phallic in significance?

The question is answered in the following passage, which also provides a good example of a transition from the historical to the phenomenological method within the same passage. Klaus K. Klostermaier writes:

> The most important manifestation of Śiva, his presence and the object of worship for his devotees, is the *liṅga*. This is the only "image" of Śiva, the formless absolute Being, to be found in the innermost sanctuary of a Śiva temple. The most ancient sculpture of a *liṅga* that still receives public worship is found in Guḍimally, South India, and dates from the second century B.C.E. Its phallic origin is established beyond doubt, *but it also can be safely said that it does not evoke any phallic associations in the minds of the worshippers*.[57]

The result obtained by the application of the phenomenological method is clear. It consists of the realisation that while almost every outsider considers the *liṅga* as phallic in significance, the believer does not think so. For the believer it is a stylised representation of Śiva.

This *phenomenological* approach should be clearly distinguished not only from the historical approach which contests the association of the *Śiva-liṅga* with the phallus on *historical* grounds, but from the following approach which contests its association with the sexual organ as such on *hermeneutical* grounds:

[56] Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983), Vol. I, p. 40.

[57] Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (second edition) (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 143, emphasis added.

> PHALLUS. The phallus, like all great religious symbols, points to a mysterious divine reality that cannot otherwise be apprehended. In this case, however, mystery seems also to surround the symbol itself. We know, for example, that the phallus is important to many Greek mysteries; but the ancients – keeping cultic secrecy – did not talk about it. Even modern Śaiva Hindus, who worship openly an upright cylinder rounded at the top and called a lingam (from the Sanskrit *liṅga*, "phallus"), are not always sure they are faced with an image of a sexual organ. The traditional reticence does serve a purpose: it suggests that in the case of the phallus there is a tendency on the part of the human mind to confuse the symbolic phallus – whether human or animal, attached to the body or isolated, realistically modeled or otherwise – with the ordinary phallus that everybody knows. It is not as a flaccid member that this symbol is most important to religion but as an erect organ. This fact serves the basic meaning of phallic imagery: that the godhead, whatever it is in itself, is a great giver of life of one kind or another.[58]

II

The application of the phenomenological method is not exhausted by the results obtained above. The phenomenological method is not restricted to perceiving religious phenomena from the point of view of the believer. Another dimension of it may be said to consist of identifying structures within these phenomena of which the believer may not *be conscious but which do not violate the self-understanding of the believer*.

The work of Stella Kramrisch on the *Śiva-liṅga* seems to belong to this category.[59] Her main conclusions are summarised below.

(1) The *Śivaliṅga* is a multivalent symbol. It is not devoid of phallic significance but it also represents a pillar of fire and a miniature pillar.[60]

(2) Considered as a phallic symbol its significance has little to do with fertility and much with lofty morality and spirituality: (i) it

[58] George P. Elder, "Phallus," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 11, p. 263.

[59] Stella Kramrisch, *Manifestations of Shiva* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1981), pp. xv–xvi.

[60] For the role of myth in relation to symbol see Jacques Waardenburg, "Symbolic Aspects of Myth," in Alan M. Olson, ed., *Myth, Symbol and Reality* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University, 1980), pp. 41–68.

represents Śiva's response when commanded to create fallible human beings by the Creator. Śiva tore off his phallus in one account, and in another turned into a post (*sthāṇu*); (ii) as an upright phallus it is ambivalent, for the seed is not shed. It represents yogic discipline.

(3) The various significations are interlinked. Thus the severed phallus of Śiva (see [2] above) in one myth penetrates to the nether world and then shoots up as a pillar of flames.

Each of these conclusions is capable of being phenomenologically elaborated.

The *Śiva-liṅga*, as a pillar of fire, figures prominently in the sacred topography of the city of Kāśī (or Banaras), uniquely associated with Śiva.[61] This is apparent in the section of the *Skanda Purāṇa* called *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, which glorifies Banaras. "One myth tells of the divine hierophany of Śiva in this place. Here, it is said, Śiva's fiery pillar of light (*jyotirliṅga*) burst from the netherworlds, split the earth, and pierced the sky – a luminous and fathomless sign of Śiva. Kāśī is not only the place where that *liṅga* of light is said to have split the earth, but in a wider sense, Kāśī is also said to be the *liṅga* of light – an enormous geographical *liṅga*, with a radius of five *krośas* (about ten miles). Even today pilgrims circumambulate Kāśī on the Pañcakrośī Road, a five-day pilgrimage circuit around the whole of the city."[62] The light possesses a wide diffusion and contains many points of light: "There are countless shrines and temples of Śiva in Kāśī, each containing a *liṅga*, which, according to Śaiva theology, is a symbol (*pratīka*) of that fathomless light of Śiva. It is said that in Kāśī there is a *liṅga* at every step; indeed, the very stones of Kāśī are Śiva *liṅgas*."[63]

From the point of view of the insider, even when the *Śiva-liṅga* is to be read as a phallus, its significance is ultimately religious, whether read as Śiva's phallus or the phallus in general. "Many of the main episodes in the Śaiva myth cycle revolve around the dynamic tension between Śiva as the god equally of asceticism and eroticism, a master of both yogic restraint and sexual prowess. This tension is frequently

[61] See Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), passim.

[62] Diana Eck, "Banaras," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 58.

[63] *Ibid.*

expressed in terms of the image of castration: the real castration of the god himself and symbolic castrations (loss of eyes or teeth, beheading) of his opponents."[64] This is reflected for instance, in the following cycles of myth:

> Śiva destroys Kāma, the god of erotic love, with the fire from his third eye when Kāma attempts to disturb his ascetic trance. Subsequently Pārvatī, daughter of the Himalaya, wins Śiva's love through her own ascetic penance and persuades him to revive Kāma in disembodied form. For his visit to the pine forest Śiva wears the guise of a naked, ash-smeared ascetic, but he uses the occasion to seduce, or to attempt to seduce, the wives of the forest sages. As a result either of the sages' curse or of his own action, Śiva is castrated and his phallus, or *liṅga*, becomes fixed in the earth. The stylized stone *liṅga*, mounted on an equally stylized vulva, or *yoni*, has become the central image of Śaiva worship and serves as the dual symbol of the god's creative and ascetic power.[65]

More generally the "*liṅga* stands erect in its double significance; full of creative power, and also of the yogic power to withhold the seed."[66]

The interlinkage of the various aspects associated with the *liṅga*, as a column of fire as well 'desire' is evident in the following account, which describes Śiva's peregrinations after he had decapitated Brahmā. Although this was done for a good reason, as a punishment meted out to Brahmā for incestuously ogling his own daughter, nevertheless Śiva had committed the crime of "killing" Brahma [Brahmā, Brāhmaṇa]." Thereafter

> [t]he head of Brahmā clings to Śiva's hand. Śiva as a penitent beggar, the skull his begging bowl, goes on a pilgrimage of expiation. After twelve years the skull falls from Śiva's hand in Banaras, and Śiva is released from his sin. His pilgrimage takes the god to a hermitage in the forest of deodar trees. The hermits believe that the young, naked, beggar has come to seduce their women – and Śiva's phallus (*liṅga*) falls from his body, by his own will or by a curse of the sages; it then arises as a flaming pillar. These events are part of the play (*līlā*) of Śiva in this world to enable his devotee to recognize God in the guises he assumed. The sages apparently fail to identify the begging bowl, Brahmā's head

[64] David N. Lorenzen, "Śaivism: An Overview," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 13, p. 9.

or skull (*brahmaśiras*), in the beggar's hand. Brahmaśiras is also the name of Śiva's formidable weapon, the Pāśupata weapon.[67]

At yet another, a fourth level, the *liṅga* becomes associated with the liberatory potential of Hinduism – *mokṣa*. George P. Elder makes such a move as we pick up the thread of Śiva's journey through the 'pine forest:'

> The god arrives in this forest and encounters religious men who have given up the household life to live in ascetic chastity with their wives. Śiva is naked, smeared with ashes, his hair wildly disheveled: "His penis and testicles were like red chalk, the tip ornamented with black and white chalk. Sometimes he laughed horribly; sometimes he sang, smiling, sometimes he danced erotically." The ascetics' wives were utterly fascinated – and some texts say the god made love to them day and night for twelve years. The husbands, upset, said of the god, "He is mad!" and cursed his phallus: "Cause your *liṅga* to fall off. This is not the *dharma* [proper conduct] of ascetics." The *liṅga* fell with drastic consequences: "Nothing shone forth; the sun gave no heat... They continued to practice *dharma*, free from egoism, free from possessiveness, but their virile powers were destroyed, and their energy was destroyed."[68]

The incident, however, can be read in the context of the *Ātman*'s quest for release from *saṁsāra*:

> Horrible as it is, this situation appears to be a necessary and unavoidable phase of *Ātman*. It seems also to be a sort of interpretation of Śiva's "destruction of the world" as symbolic – for the world is not actually destroyed; there is simply no heat, no light, or energy. The cure is not to return to the original situation with its wild and erotic expression of the Lord Śiva's creativity, another necessary phase of *Ātman*. Instead, the men are told to make an image of the phallus they had seen, and presumably an image of the *liṅga* that has fallen.[69]

[65] *Ibid.* For a more detailed discussion of the asceticism-eroticism dynamic in relation to Śiva see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *op. cit.*, passim.
[66] Stella Kramrisch, "Śiva," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 13, p. 340.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] George P. Elder, *op. cit.*, Vol. 11, p. 267.
[69] *Ibid.*

But one can also rise by what one falls.

> ...the image of the castrated *liṅga* is obviously also the divine erection of Lord Śiva; it is at once creator and destroyer. Should the men in the rather "phallic" pine forest worship this image as they are told, with baths, flowers, and the creative sounds of *mantras*, they will be worshipping *Ātman* simultaneously: to "see" *Ātman* is to become free from attachment to either birth or death – and that is the goal of the Hindu religion.[70]

This association of the *Śiva-liṅga* with *mokṣa* is attested to by no less a figure than that of Rāmakṛṣṇa (1836–1886). "Do you know the significance of the Śiva emblem? It is the worship of fatherhood and motherhood. The devotee worshipping the image prays, 'O Lord, please grant that I may not be born into this world again; that I may not have to pass again through a mother's womb.'"[71]

Note that the female counterpart of the male sexual organ has also been associated with the *liṅga* (as *yoni*) in the course of the discussion, which should intensify its overtly sexual significance from the *outsider's point of view*. From the *insider's point of view*, however, this association renders the symbol paradoxically spiritually even more potent. The following entry under *yoni* consolidates such an understanding unexpectedly:

> YONI is a Sanskrit word with various meanings such as "womb, vulva, vagina; place of birth, source, origin, spring; abode, home, lair nest; family, race stock, caste," and so on. It is etymologically derived from the verbal root *yu* ("join, unite, fasten, or harness"), from which is derived the English *yoke*; *ni* is added to the root to form a noun with active meaning. Thus *yoni* is "what joins or unites." The word *yoga*, derived from the same root, means "union, connection." The two words *yoni* and *yoga* are thus similar to the word *religion*, from the Latin *religio* ("binding, fastening, or relinking").[72]

These interpretations, although phallic in significance at times, do not violate the self-understanding of the believers (even when phal-

[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), p. 604.
[72] Frédérique Apffel Marglin, "Yoni," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 15, p. 530.

lic) because they are nestled within the liberative matrix of the Hindu tradition (namely, *mokṣa*). The points to note with special care are that (1) the symbol is not exclusively phallic in significance for the believer and (2) when it is phallic in significance, its significance for the insider diverges from the significance it possesses for the outsider, for whom it merely represents an aspect of fertility.

III

The reach of the phenomenological method can also be extended still further. The phenomenological method is also *comparative*, inasmuch as it involves comparing similar phenomena across religions. The following comment by Stella Kamrisch represents a move in that direction: "In the world of Śiva, the significance of the *liṅga* is comparable to that of the Cross, in the Christian world, and that of Śiva with the *liṅga*, or of the faces of Śiva together with the *liṅga*, of the figure of the Savior on the Cross."[73]

Others have chosen to compare the worship of the *Śiva-liṅga* with the Christian rite of the Eucharist. Just as, to the outsider (but not to the insider), the *liṅga*, at least at first blush, appears unmistakably sexual in significance, the Eucharist, at first sight, appears alarmingly cannibalistic (to the outsider, but not to the insider).

It is obvious then that the phenomenological method harvests a very different set of insights when it is brought to bear on the *Śiva-liṅga* than might be forthcoming by the application of other methods.[74]

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[73] Stella Kramrisch, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

[74] It might be worth adding that a *feminist* insider to the tradition may see a significance in *yoni* which may surpass that of the *liṅga*. A move in this direction is immanent in the following passage (Frédérique Apffel Marglin, *op. cit.*, p. 531): "Archaeological remains from the sites at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro abound in mother-goddess figurines, large stone yonis (and lingams), and a variety of seals. One of the most intriguing of these seals bears the figure of a man in a cross-legged posture typical of yogic discipline. The religious complex of ideas and practices called *yoga* has been identified as being pre-Vedic in origin; the yogic posture of the figure on this Indus Valley seal is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the pre-Vedic origins of yoga. Scholars have until recently identified this horned yogic person as a proto-image of Śiva. More recent research has identified the scene depicted on the seal as being linked with an archaic form of the still-practiced buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess. On the

D: Mystical: How Unique is the Mystic's Claim?

Mysticism has typically been explored from the vantage point of philosophy rather than phenomenology. In this section an attempt will be made to understand philosophical concepts phenomenologically, specially as applied to the description of mystical states.

I

I would like to begin by asking the following question: Is it possible to suggest, in the light of Hindu epistemology, that some of the problems we tend to regard as unique to the mystic's claim have analogues in cases of ordinary perception? Allow me to list some of these possible parallels and then we shall see what conclusions could be drawn from such an exercise.

(1) In one school of Hindu thought it is explicitly maintained that "consciousness of objects does not imply self-consciousness." Consider the two expressions: "This is a table" and "I see a table." According to this school, the character of the knowledge which is expressible as "This is a table" is such that the person who apprehends an object need not actually realise that *he* or *she* is doing so. This is what is meant by saying that the "consciousness of objects does not imply self-consciousness." Now if an observer knows an object at one instance, the observer may, if he or she so wills, become aware of himself or herself as knowing it in a second instant and this knowledge is then expressible as "I see a table."

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seal the Goddess is represented next to her mount, the lion, which is shown in a dynamic posture facing the seated figure on its right, corresponding to the northern direction with the Goddess. The yogic posture of the buffalo-horned god has been interpreted as expressive of the destructive and creative power entailed by the sacrifice. The sacrifice itself aims at a symbolic unification with the goddess. In many popular South Indian myths concerning this sacrifice, the buffalo is depicted as desiring or actually uniting with the Goddess in the guise of a lower-caste husband or suitor. As David Shulman has shown in his discussion of south Indian mythology, Śiva becomes the buffalo. Through sacrificial death, Śiva as the buffalo consort of the goddess is reborn from her. In these myths and representations we seem to be able to apprehend the common etymology of the terms *yoni* and *yoga*. Union with the Goddess is the ultimate aim of the sacrifice; it is at one and the same time an abstract concept and a concrete act of union with the Goddess's icon, namely her *yoni*."

The point to note here is that these are considered two *separate* instants in this school of Hindu philosophy and they do not, of necessity, imply each other. "If an observer does not care for such after-knowledge (*anu-vyavasāya*), as it is termed, it does not arise at all." It is thus possible to have consciousness of objects without self-consciousness.

One of the elements in the mystic's claim which often baffles scholars is the claim about loss of self-consciousness in mystical experience. But if the above description of the process of ordinary perceptual experience is in some sense correct, then that claim is not as far out as might appear at first sight, for it is capable of being brought into relation with even ordinary perceptual experience. The loss of self-consciousness should not be confused with the loss of self itself. Once this distinction is kept in mind and it is realised that when "you are conscious ... you are not [always] aware of yourself as being conscious," the loss of self-consciousness as part of the mystic's claim perhaps becomes less baffling.

(2) Let us now draw upon another school of Hindu thought for the next example, which points out that one may simultaneously lose *both* "self-consciousness as well as the conscious self," while undergoing certain experiences. In the previous example only the loss of self-consciousness was involved, but not of the conscious self. In that case the conscious self, "if he or she so wills" could become aware of knowing something at a later instant and thus regain self-consciousness as implied in the statement: "*I* see a table" as distinguished from the statement: "This is a table."

The example we have to deal with now is that of deep or dreamless sleep. While in sleep we lose touch with *both* self-consciousness *as well as* our conscious self simultaneously. And unlike the previous instance, we cannot in a second instant regain our self-consciousness. In this case, the regaining of self-consciousness involves our falling out of the state we are in, namely, sleep. This was not the case in our previous example. A vital point seems to be involved here – that in order to be able to speak of sleep we must be *out* of that state. We can talk about sleep, but only when we are not asleep. And when we talk about sleep we can only do so after the actual experience has been reduced to a mental phenomenon – namely, memory. In the case of the table – when we moved from the perception "This is a table" to the perception "I see a table" no change in the general state of consciousness was involved, which remained, the waking state. What brought about this new knowledge was only a shift in attention on the part of the mind, in the self-same waking state.

In the case of sleep, the ability to state: "I have slept" means stepping *out* of that state in order to make that claim and the making of that claim requires recollection or memory on part of the mind. The phenomenon of sleep is not *directly* communicable by the person who is asleep; it is only *indirectly* communicable in a post-factum manner.

Why is the phenomenon of sleep not directly communicable by the person undergoing the experience? It has been suggested that this is so because in deep sleep the subject-object distinction is temporarily obscured. Could not the mystic's claim that at least certain mystical experiences are not directly communicable be accounted for in terms of the fact that in these mystical states the distinction between the experience and the experiencer gets temporarily dissolved either psychologically (as in *bhakti*) or ontologically (as in *jñāna*)? However, as all claims can only be made through a process of communication, and all communication, as we know it, presupposes a distinction between subject and object, the mystic faces the predicament, like the person asleep, that any statement about the mystical state can only be made by a mystic when the mystic is outside it, or, if you wish, when the mystic is not a mystic! Perhaps the commonsensical example of sleep may rescue his point from logical obscurity if we recognise what I would like to call the *Brahms paradox* in honour of the famous musician. It is said that Brahms took seven years to compose his famous lullaby because he kept falling asleep on the piano.

(3) I draw my third example from another school of Hindu thought, but here again the context is that of ordinary perception. When we mistake one thing from another, as, for instance, someone else's car for our own, we call it an error. Error implies incomplete knowledge. Now the question is: Do we in the course of daily living really ever possess complete knowledge of anything? Even when we look at what we know to be our car, we can never, in a single act of cognition, see the whole of it. If we are looking at it from the front we can't see the rear; if we are looking at it from one angle we can't

see it from another. In other words, our knowledge of it is always incomplete. This raises the crucial question: If all knowledge is necessarily incomplete, how do we distinguish erroneous knowledge from correct knowledge?

One might wish to reflect on the situation for a moment. When a mystic says that the ultimate reality cannot be known exhaustively, can only be known incompletely we throw up our arms in omniscient despair; but when we are told that we can't know or don't know our own car completely we remain totally unfazed! Here again we have a parallel between ordinary experience and mystical experience – both seem to take place in an overall context of incomplete knowledge.

Conclusion

To the extent that the issues involved in the mystic's claim and the claims based on ordinary experience are isomorphic, I am inclined to draw the following conclusions from what has been said so far:

(1) A phenomenological analysis suggests that the mystic's claim is less mystical than might appear at first sight, when compared to everyday experience;

(2) or that the phenomenon of ordinary sense perception is more akin to the mystical than we usually assume; or

(3) that as the nuclear physicist said: "Everything is more complicated than it seems."

Having drawn my own, I am happy to let you draw your own conclusions about the mystic's claim!

E: Spiritual: A Phenomenological Exploration of Hindu Feminine Spirituality – Domesticity to Divinity

The spiritual experience of women is rich and varied the world over, also, so it would appear, within Hinduism. However, no comprehensive attempt, to the best of our knowledge, has been made to present it systematically, that is, in rhe form of a phenomenological typology.[75] The only attempt I am aware of in this direction is the one

[75] For an attempt at typologies of redemption in general see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and C. Jouco Bleeker, eds., *Types of Redemption* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970).

undertaken by Lynn Teskey Denton, in her discussion of the varieties of Hindu female asceticism.[76]

In this section a modest attempt will be made to extend the discussion of Hindu female spirituality to the domestic sphere. To anticipate the results of the survey, they seem to fall into three categories: (1) the fusion of domesticity and divinity; (2) the confusion of domesticity with divinity; and (3) the exclusion of domesticity by divinity, on the basis of the textual, biographical and autobiographical material available to us. No doubt the discussion will assume a finer texture and become more nuanced with further research and it will be interesting to see how this trichotomy fares with the passage of time. For the time being, however, let me present such material as I can.

I

At one end of the spectrum one finds the identification of domesticity with divinity. The earliest hints of this are contained in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, which brackets women with *śūdras*[77] for the first time, a process which would ultimately develop into a hermeneutical principle within the tradition of classical Hinduism.[78] Its sociological implications have largely been negative, such as the denial of access to Vedic studies and ritual though even here there is a silver lining on that dark cloud which we will now try to mint, speaking spiritually.

The cue is provided by the statement in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, that the *śūdra* is unfit for sacrifice because he was created without a deity.[79] However, almost immediately his deity is identified as the *veśmapati*, or lord of the house. The development of the idea that the husband is analogous to a deity for a woman, in later Hinduism, seems to have its roots here, if the parallel with the position of the

[76] Lynn Teskey Denton, "Varieties of Hindu Female Asceticism," in Julia Leslie, ed., *Roles and Rituals of Hindu Women* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), pp. 211–231.

[77] *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1.31.

[78] A. S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 204.

[79] *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* I. 68–69.

śūdra is pressed. The process involves a series of substitutions. The wife was originally a partner in the Vedic ritual[80] but as she came to be excluded from it by a complex process, her marriage replaced her rite of initiation in Vedic ritual and her husband took the place of the deity.[81] This development, which is almost bizarre by modern standards, seems to possess its own inner logic, and also a spiritual dynamic, as we shall see later.

In its classical form this identification of domestic life with the divine is found in the *Manusmṛti* in the following passages (V. 153–169):

> 153. The husband who wedded her with sacred texts, always gives happiness to his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.
> 154. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.
> 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart (from their husbands); if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that (reason alone) be exalted in heaven.
> 156. A faithful wife, who desires to dwell (after death) with her husband, must never do anything that might displease him who took her hand, whether he be alive or dead.
> 157. At her pleasure let her emaciate her body by (living on) pure flowers, roots, and fruit; but she must never even mention the name of another man after her husband has died.
> 158. Until death let her be patient (of hardships), self-controlled, and chaste, and strive (to fulfil) that most excellent duty which (is prescribed) for wives who have one husband only.
> 159. Many thousands of Brāhmaṇas who were chaste from their youth, have gone to heaven without continuing their race.
> 160. A virtuous wife who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste, reaches heaven, though she have no son, jnst like those chaste men.
> 161. But a woman who from a desire to have offspring violates her duty towards her (deceased) husband, brings on herself disgrace in this world, and loses her place with her husband (in heaven).

[80] Frederick M. Smith, "Indra's Curse," in Julia Leslie, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 20–21.
[81] One verse in the *Manusmṛti* (II.67) makes the following equations between the domestic and Vedic worlds: nuptial ceremony = initiation; service of husband = residing with Guru; household duties = daily worship of sacred fire.

> 162. Offspring begotten by another man is here not (considered lawful), nor (does offspring begotten) on another man's wife (belong to the begetter), nor is a second husband anywhere prescribed for virtuous women.
> 163. She who cohabits with a man of higher caste, forsaking her own husband who belongs to a lower one, will become contemptible in this world, and is called a remarried woman (parapūrvā).
> 164. By violating her duty towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in this world, (after death) she enters the womb of a jackal, and is tormented by diseases (the punishment of) her sin.
> 165. She who, controlling her thoughts, words, and deeds, never slights her lord, resides (after death) with her husband (in heaven), and is called a virtuous (wife).
> 166. In reward of such conduct, a female who controls her thoughts, speech, and actions, gains in this (life) highest renown, and in the next (world) a place near her husband.[82]

[82] *The Laws of Manu*, trans. G. Bühler (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967; 2nd Reprint, first published 1886), pp. 196–197. For a modern translation see Wendy Doniger (with Brian K. Smith), *The Laws of Manu* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 115–116:

> [153] A husband who performs a transformative ritual (of marriage) with Vedic verses always makes his woman happy, hoth when she is in her fertile season and when she is not, both here on earth and in the world beyond. [154] A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities. [155] Apart (from their husbands), women cannot sacrifice or undertake a vow or fast; it is because a wife obeys her husband that she is exalted in heaven.
> [156] A virtuous wife should never do anything displeasing to the hushand who took her hand in marriage, when he is alive or dead, if she longs for her husband's world (after death). [157] When her husband is dead she may fast as much as she likes, (living) on auspicious flowers, roots, and fruits, but she should not even mention the name of another man. [158] She should be long-suffering until death, self-restrained, and chaste, striving (to fulfil) the unsurpassed duty of women who have one husband. [159] Many thousands of priests who were chaste from their youth have gone to heaven without begetting offspring to continue the family. [160] A virtuous wife who remains chaste when her husband has died goes to heaven just like those chaste men, even if she has no sons.
> [161] But a woman who violates her (vow to her dead) husband because she is greedy of progeny is the object of reproach here on earth and loses the world beyond. [162] No (legal) progeny are begotten here by another man or in another man's wife; nor is a second hushand ever prescrihed for virtuous women. [163] A woman who abandons her own inferior husband

These passages seem to be a feminised version of three male models of salvation: (1) the *guru-śīṣya*; (2) the *sannyāsin*; and (3) the *yogin* models.

In the *guru-śīṣya* relationship, the *śīṣya* ultimately achieves what the *guru* has achieved and does so by implicit obedience of the *guru*. Since this idea of implicit obedience is averse to our modern taste, it requires an act of imagination to grasp it. Perhaps such a forthright statement of it as the following by Ramaṇa Mahari will help:

> This is the meaning conveyed by the story of Ashtavakra and Janaka. The anecdotes differ in different books. We are not concerned with the names and the embellishments. *The tattva, i.e., the moral, must not be lost sight of. The disciple surrenders himself to the master. That means there is no vestige of individuality retained by the disciple.* If the surrender is complete all sense of individuality is lost and there is thus no cause for misery. The eternal being is only happiness. That is revealed.[83]

In this Advaitic interpretation of the *guru-śiṣya* relationship the point is that one's ego (= mind = *vāsanā* = individuality = *avidyā*) is the sole obstacle to one's realisation and surrendering to the guru means surrendering the ego.

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and lives with a superior man becomes an object of reproach in this world; she is said to be 'previously had by another man'. [164] A woman who is unfaithful to her husband is an object of reproach in this world; (then) she is reborn in the womb of a jackal and is tormented by the diseases born of her evil.

[165] The woman who is not unfaithful to her husband and who restrains her mind, speech, and body reaches her husband's worlds (after death), and good people call her a virtuous woman. [166] The woman who restrains her mind-and-heart, speech, and body through this behaviour wins the foremost renown here on earth and her husband's world in the hereafter.

83 *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1984), p. 318. An important point needs to be made at this stage. One of the functions of Hinduism is to offer emancipation to its adherents in any *given* social, economic, political, i.e. historical situation. This is what I understand by the description of *mokṣa* as the *parama puruṣārtha* in its axiology. In other words, *given* the inferior status of women in *dharmaśāstrika* Hinduism how might liberation be achieved? At the same time, it is also a part of the dynamic of Hinduism to ameliorate these conditions to the maximum extent in any given situation, just as it tries to maximise the emancipatory potential of any given situation. This is what I take to be the significance of the acceptance of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* as *puruṣārthas* within it.

There might be a catch, however. If the *śiṣya* can only go as far as the *guru*, the wife or *patnī* can only go as far as the *pati*. What the wife gains, then, is either exaltation in heaven or the company of the husband presumably in heaven. But mark, no *mokṣa*. Even in the famous *Mahābhārata* story, the dutiful wife displays paranormal powers but there is no mention of *mokṣa*.[84] In the Tāntrika reversal of this model, however, where the hnsband becomes the disciple of the wife, he is led to *mokṣa*, as in the *Tripurārahasya*.[85] A modern example is provided by Bholānath, the husband of Ānandamayee Mā, who became the disciple of his wife in a marriage which was never consummated. There is no record of his attaining *mokṣa*, however.[86]

The second model is that of the renunciant, which the wife should follow as a widow. The statement found in V.160, "though she have no son," is interesting, for this could be used as an argument for her remarriage!

If a wife completely surrenders to her husband (spiritually and not merely socially) then, by the logic of Advaita Vedānta, she should attain *jīvanmukti*![87] However, this logic, to the best of our knowledge, has not been pushed to its spiritual limits in the case of women.

The third model, that of the *yogin*, has been invoked to understand the phenomenon of voluntary *Satī*, and has been discussed in detail by Alaka Hejib and Katherine K. Young.[88]

A convolution of this case, which seems to transcend this category even as it falls into it, is the case when God himself is treated as the husband, instead of the husband behind treated as a god. The case of Āṇṭāl seems to belong here. The story is well-known but may be summarised here. Āṇṭāl, otherwise known as Kōtai (or Godā) was

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84 *The Mahābhārata*, trans. J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), Vol. 2, pp. 614–617.

85 A. U. Vasavada, *Tripurā-Rahasya* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1965), pp. 22ff.

86 For details see Alexander Lipski, *Life and Teachings of Śrī Anandamayī Mā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), p. 13, etc.

87 *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 284, 404–406, etc.

88 Alaka Hejib and Katherine K. Young, "Sati, Widowhood and Yoga," in Arvind Sharma et al., *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), pp. 73ff.

the daughter of a priest, Viṣṇucitta, and refused to accept anyone other than Viṣṇu as her husband.

> Viṣṇucitta, worried about Āṇṭāl's state of mind, was comforted again by Viṣṇu in a dream, telling him that Āṇṭāl would indeed be his bride. Legend has it that Viṣṇu miraculously organized a marriage party with musicians and dancers, to accompany Āṇṭāl from Śrīvilliputtūr to Śrī Raṅgam. When Āṇṭāl left the palanquin and stepped up to the reclining Viṣṇu image, she mysteriously vanished into the image. Viṣṇu appeared again to Viṣṇucitta, accepting him as his father-in-law, and requested him to continue serving him as Śrīvilliputtūr. There, a shrine was built in honor of Āṇṭāl within the compound of the Viṣṇu temple containing her richly adorned bronze statue and a long inscription, phrased as a love letter from Viṣṇu to Āṇṭāl. Her hymns are sung daily in Śrīvilliputtūr and other Viṣṇu shrines in the Tamil country.[89]

We know of no case in which the Goddess and the devotee are married, but that may only reflect one's limited knowledge of Hinduism.

II

The next category consists of cases of women who have not pursued domestic divinity but rather divinity within domesticity. That is to say, they have lived an emancipatory life while leading their life as wives, recognising and adjusting the rival claims of the domestic and spiritual life.

We must commence this section, however, with an account in which the husband saw the handwriting on the wall, and left his wife free to follow her devotional path. In this respect, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, one of three women included in the list of sixty-three canonised Śaiva saints called *nāyanār*

> deserves special mention. The daughter of a merchant-prince, she was a devotee of the Lord from her childhood, and a dutiful wife after her marriage. Her husband, realizing in some extraordinary way that she was the object of divine favour and was spiritually far superior to him, quietly left her, married again, and settled in a distant city. On learning his whereabouts after some years, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār went out to

[89] Klaus K. Klostermaier, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

> meet him. The hushand, with his new family, reverently saluted her, and proclaimed to spectators that he considered her a person worthy of his worship. As soon as Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār realized his changed attitude towards her, she renounced all attachment for him and to the world and spent her life in search of God. She has enshrined her experiences in verses, many of which are remarkable for their depth of thought and lucidity of expression.[90]

An opposite example is provided by the case of Sambandhar. He was also a *nāyanār*. About him "it is narrated that before the marriage ceremony was over, he and his wife, together with his devotees were, on his prayer, carried away by a divine light."[91]

A modern example of a similar pursuit of divinity within domesticity (but without an incident of celestial zapping) is provided by Śāradā Devī, the wife of Rāmakṛṣṇa, another case reportedly of an unconsummated marriage. There are elements of Tāntrika role reversal here. Rāmakṛṣṇa is said to have worshipped his wife as a goddess, when she arrived to live with him.[92]

In these examples the religious enthusiasm could be contained within the four walls of the home, even if it filled it. Such was not always the case. Sometimes the house almost collapsed under pressure. Three primary examples here are provided by the lives of Bahiṇābāī (seventeenth century), Mīrā Bāī (sixteenth century) and Lallā Dēd (fourteenth century).

Bahiṇābāī's autobiographical account is a fascinating depiction of a woman's spiritual struggle. It can only be summarised here. She was a Brahmin and was married early in life to a traditional priest. When the family settled at Kolhapur, she, barely thirteen, acquired a taste for the hymns of Tukārāma. "This upset her husband who thought that a wife who had broken the rules laid down for a brahmin wife brought shame on his family. He treated Bahiṇā harshly, while her parents and others felt they could not interfere. They told

[90] S. Satchidanandam Pillai, "The Śaiva Saints of South India," in Haridas Bhattacharyya, ed., *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1956), Vol. IV, p. 345.

[91] *Ibid.*, pp. 342–343.

[92] For details see Swami Pavitrananda, *A Short Life of the Holy Mother* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), especially pp. 21–22.

her that a husband's right over his wife is supreme. Her husband did not follow the devotional cult of Viṭhohā: he declared that, for a wife, her husband is the only god. Bahiṇā was forbidden to attend any congregation and to go to any temple."[93] Sanjukta Gupta offers the following analysis of her spiritual pursuits thereafter:

> At this point, Bahiṇā's religious propensities hardened into conviction. She solved the outward clash with her husband – in which she had no support from any of her close relatives or friends – by totally internalizing her religious activities. She dreamt that Tukārām came and initiated her with rhe six-syllable Vaiṣṇava mantra (*rāma-kṛṣṇa-hari*). As a result, she was able to reconcile herself to staying home as a humble wife and to curbing her desire to visit temples and so on. She played the role of a dutiful wife while mentally renouncing all attachment to life. She became a mother, but strangely enough did not accept her son as a son but treated him as a fellow religious aspirant and a friend (*kalyāṇa-bandhu*). Her mental rejection of her husband was complete. She made that clear in her songs, [in] which [she] narrated her present and previous lives to her son.[94]

Thus in her case, as presented here, the restrictions enjoined on women in the lawbooks "enabled Bahiṇā's husband to impede seriously her religious aspirations,"[95] impediments which were overcome more successfully in the accounts that follow.

Mīrā Bāī from "early childhood on loved and worshipped an image of Kṛṣṇa as her future bridegroom. She used to adorn it, bathe it, sleep with it, sing to it, dance around it, and she imagined herself to be wedded to it."[96] When she grew up, however, she was betrothed to Bhojarāj, the prince of Chitor. The rest of her life is a story of her steady pursuit of her devotion to Kṛṣṇa amidst the oscillations most marriages are subject to, of which she perhaps had more of her share than others because of her devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The fact that the family-deity of her in-laws was the Goddess did not help, nor what

93 Sanjukta Gupta, "Women in the Śaiva/Śākta ethos," in Julia Leslie, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 204.

94 *Ibid.*, pp. 204–205. Accounts of past lives are extremely rare in Hinduism and this alone makes Bahiṇā Bāī's account a spiritual treasure.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 195, note 4.

96 Klaus K. Klostermaier, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

must have appeared obsessive devotion to Kṛṣṇa in the eyes of her husband. She left home for a while and went to live in the city of Vrindāvan, holy to Kṛṣṇa, but was requested to return to Chitor 'free to pursue her Kṛṣṇa worship as she liked.' She did, but then her husband passed away. She did not commit Satī because she was really married to the eternal Kṛṣṇa. She was persecuted by the family and several attempts on her life are said to have been divinely foiled. 'She eventually returned to Vrindāban completely immersed in her love for Kṛṣṇa, who eventually absorbed her into his image.'[97]

III

The case of Lallā Dēd is different. She was driven by marital discord to embrace a life of spirituality so that in her case domesticity may be truly said to have been a catalyst for divinity, as in the case of some nuns in the time of the Buddha. Lallā came from a Brahmin family in Kashmir and was married in early life to "a young Brahmin who apparently was very much under the influence of his mother. According to tradition the latter hated her daughter-in-law and was very unkind to her. Not content with torturing Lallā herself, she also managed to poison her son's mind against her. Lallā's deep religiosity and independence of spirit may have triggered this animosity. Another possible cause was the fact that Lallā never had any children. It is said that finally her mother-in-law managed to turn her out of her conjugal home."[98]

Conjugal calamity was apparently God's opportunity, for in thus turning her out she gave Kashmir one of its greatest mystics. Lallā turned into a spiritual seeker who "roamed about wearing a minimum of clothes and sometimes none at all" as she poetically testifies:

> Dance then, Lallā, clothed but by the air:
> Sing then, Lallā, clad but in the sky.
> Air and sky: what garment is more fair?
> "Cloth," said Custom – Doth that sanctify?[99]

97 *Ibid.*, p. 370. But see Sanjukta Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 203–204.

98 Sanyukta Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 199–200.

99 Cited in Louis Renou, *Hinduism* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), p. 209.

Her profound spirituality, as exemplified by the following verses, provides the proper note to end this section on:

Lord, myself not always have I known;
  Nay, nor any other self than mine.
Care for this vile body have I shown,
  Mortified by me to make me Thine.

Lord, that I am Thou I did not know,
  Nor that Thou art I, that One be Twain.
"Who am I?" is Doubt of doubts, and so
  "Who art Thou?" shall lead to birth again.

Śiva or Keśava, 'Lotus-Lord' or Jin:
  These be Names. Yet takes Thou from me
All the ill that is my World within;
  He be Thou, or he, or ḥe, or he.[100]

F. A New Proposal: Are some Methods (such as the Phenomenological) Better Suited for Studying Certain Traditions?

The purpose of this section of the chapter is to propose that certain methods may be better suited for studying certain traditions.

The method I would like to select for further examination is the phenomenology of religion, and the traditions I will, in due course, appose to it are Hinduism and Buddhism. Before I do so, however, I would like to create the conceptual space for developing my argument by drawing attention to a criticism often levelled against the work of some well-known phenomenologists of the past, such as Gerardus van der Leeuw. Geo Widengren considers his famous work, known as *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* in its English translation (1963), as "seriously marred by the fact that its material is taken chiefly from the religions of illiterate people."[101] Widengren alludes to this fact again later at some length, when he says:

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 208.
[101] Geo Widengren, "An Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion," in Walter H. Capps, ed., *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 142–143.

> In this regard it has already been pointed out that van der Leeuw showed a remarkable onesidedness in his choice of material in so far as the religions of illiterate peoples were quoted out of all proportion to their real importance. This was most probably a heritage from the days of the works belonging to the old 'comparative religion' with its evolutionistic overestimation of what was called 'primitive religion', a term and notion still very popular in some German quarters. This misplacement of accents is to be discovered also in such phenomenological textbooks and monographs which are not at all based upon the same presuppositions as van der Leeuw's, Goldammer's and Heiler's, e.g. those of Pettazzoni and Eliade. I myself also have to confess my shortcomings in this respect but I have tried resolutely to remedy this fault in a forthcoming textbook.[102]

This aspect of the phenomenology of religion is also implicitly noted without criticism by C. J. Bleeker.[103] The mention of Eliade enables us to carry the thread of the argument further, for "[c]ritics have also charged that his approach is influenced by various normative judgements and an assumed ontological position, which is partial to the religious, nonhistorical mode of being and to certain Eastern and archaic phenomenon."[104]

The point can now be made that the associations established in the last line of the comment cited above are not accidental. This becomes clear once attention is drawn to the fact that the phenomenological method in the study of religion is ahistorical by nature. In fact, this is one of the points of criticism directed against it, as when it is said that although "the significance of religious phenomena can be clarified to a great extent if they are examined, so to say, as arrested pictures. But it should not be forgotten that they are also moving pictures i.e. that they are subject to a certain dynamic."[105] The point involved cuts even deeper. Phenomenology of religion, as a method, is not concerned with historical origins. "Thus phenomenology knows nothing of any historical 'development' of religion,

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[103] C. J. Bleeker, *The Sacred Bridge* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), pp. 10–11.
[104] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, p. 279.
[105] Geo Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

still less of an origin of religion,"[106] a celebrated statement on the point which has also been cited earlier.

It is well known that both the primal religions and Hinduism (and to a certain extent Buddhism), as religious traditions, are ahistorical in nature, while the phenomenology of religion is ahistorical as a method. Should it come entirely as a surprise that they meet fruitfully on the same plane? This point becomes all the more forceful when the following consideration is taken into account, that phenomenology of religion traces religious congruences to similarity of human psychic structures, rather than to diffusion, and even accounts for the fact of diffusion, when documented, along these lines.[107] Hinduism's claim, that it constitutes a *sanātana dharma* or an immemorial or eternal tradition, may be understood in this light. D. S. Sarma commences his book *Hinduism Through the Ages* with the following paragraph, which now also becomes methodologically striking in the light of what has just been said. Sarma writes:

> One of the characteristics of ancient Hindu thought is its indifference to history. In discussing the contents of a book, for instance, ancient and even medieval Indian writers care very little for the date or the life of the author. They care more for the truth of experience or the soundness of doctrine than for the circumstances that gave it birth. What Sir Charles Eliot says of the religious mind in general is particularly applicable to them. "The truly religious mind does not care for the history of religion, just as, among us, the scientific mind does not dwell on the history of science." But there is no doubt that the Hindu writers went to one extreme in ignoring history altogether while modern Western writers go to the other extreme in making too much of the historical treatment of thought and art and digging at the roots of a tree instead of enjoying its flower and fruit.[108]

The reference to enjoying the "flower and fruit" is a bit quaint, unless one brings the cosmic tree into the picture![109] But the main

[106] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 688.

[107] Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 103–105.

[108] D. S. Sarma, *Hinduism Through the Ages* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956), p. 1.

[109] Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 98.

point is a different one. It relates to Eliade's vision that modern human beings live in a unidimensional world subject to the terror of time; and a live contact of the transtemporal realms of the primal religions and a Hindu world-view may prove liberative in such a context.[110]

In Hinduism, the trans-historical dimension tends to be both metaphysical *and* psychological. Buddhism, too, contains both the elements but chooses to focus more on the psychological. It is particularly significant, from this point of view, that a recent book considers a historical presentation of Buddhism as antithetical to the genius of the tradition. Roger Corless, in his *The Vision of Buddhism*, maintains that the concept of history, in a historical presentation, is "a western, post-Christian, academic discipline, is non-Buddhist, even anti-Buddhist. It is a method of study alien to Buddhism and, hence, any attempt to explain Buddhism *primarily* by means of its history obscures, and sometimes destroys, the reality, that is, the Buddhism that it is trying to study and explain."[111]

The same could be said of Hinduism. Perhaps the presentations of both these traditions, in primarily phenomenological rather than historical terms, might put an end to the epistemic violence they have hitherto suffered. The temptation to be simplistic in this context, however, should be avoided. It is not the point that just because arguably Buddhism has a fundamentally psychological and pragmatic orientation[112] or Hinduism a metaphysical and doctrinally tolerant orientation,[113] the substitution of the historical by the phenomenological method will generate instant understanding of these traditions; the point rather is that the phenomenological method holds greater promise of yielding clues to their understanding, to the

[110] J. G. Arapura, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–53, etc.

[111] Roger Corless, *The Vision of Buddhism* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. xx.

[112] Lama Anagarika Govinda, *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* (London: Rider & Company, 1961), pp. 35–44.

[113] T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana, 1960), pp. 16–29; Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (ed. Joseph Campbell) (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1946), pp. 194–195.

extent that the nature of the method ceases to be inimical to the nature of the tradition, especially as the historical method may be freighted with nineteenth-century evolutionary and historicist assumptions[114] antithetical to the texture of these traditions.

[114] S. H. Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," in *Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), Vol. III, pp. 26–27.

CHAPTER XI

Philosophical Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Religion

I

The fact that the two expressions 'philosophical phenomenology' and 'phenomenology of religion' share the word phenomenology is likely to raise the following question in the reader's mind: Is this a linguistic accident or is there more to it? At one level the question is easily answered: Yes, there is more to it. It is when one turns to the question of how much more, that the debate starts. Let it be conceded at the very outset that the fact that they are different does not mean that they are independent, and further, that the dependence involved is primarily of the phenomenology of religion on philosophical phenomenology. It should be obvious by now, though, that such dependence, even if unilateral, does not involve subservience and further that the extent and nature of the dependence itself is a matter of dispute.

This dependence, the nature and extent of which as yet must remain undetermined, is both chronological and logical, or if one prefers, historical and philosophical. Moreover, the two go hand in hand. One may, therefore, begin by exploring the historical links between the two.

II

If one chooses to start the story from the Enlightenment, one might say that, beginning with René Descartes (1596–1650), rationalist assumptions dominated philosophy until the beginning of the twentieth century. The story of its emancipation from these assumptions

in England is an intriguing one,[1] but must be bypassed in favour of a liberation of a different kind from it, which made its appearance in Germany and is more directly related to onr present concern. It took the form of philosophical phenomenology. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is widely, if not nniversally, regarded as its founder. It assumed many forms, just as the phenomenology of religion was destined to in its own good time. "Husserl's major claim was that philosophy must divest itself of all metaphysical presuppositions: it must investigate what actually confronts it, not allowing any distorting factor to intervene and prevent it from achieving its goal of direct analysis of essences or general structures."[2] The significance of this thrust of Husserlian thought for religious stndies lay in this, that the 'science of religion,' or *Religionswissenschaft*, had been conceived in the heyday of rationalism in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the scientific method was regarded as the paradigm of such rationality. Jan de Vries puts the picture in its proper perspective with a few bold strokes when, taking "a bird's-eye view of history," he speaks of a movement "that remained dominant from the seventeenth century until the beginning of the twentieth. In the eighteenth century we spoke of Rationalism, in the nineteenth century we speak of Positivism, but both times we have to do with the dominion of the *ratio* over emotion and imagination. The nineteenth century is characterized by two further movements that are closely allied to this dominion of reason: historicism, which arose in the humanities, and evolutionism, which had its great day in the science of biology. It goes without saying that they are in principle most closely linked."[3]

In other words, the scientific method in the sciences, rationalism in philosophy, and historicism in religious stndies, were diverse manifestations of the dominance of reason in the intellectual history of the period, at the expense of other faculties, with which human

1 Keith M. Parsons, *God and the Burden of Proof* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1989), Chapter I.

2 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 223–224.

3 Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion: A Historical Approach*, trans. Kees W. Bolle (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p. 61.

beings are equally endowed. The forces set in motion by the phenomenological movement in the twenties and the thirties, in the study of philosophy, produced their reverberations in the study of religion, reaching their high point perhaps in the sixties, when the forces released by the number of phenomenologists of religion who flourished prior to or during this period produced their full impact.[4] The question now is: How may one assess the influence of one on the other?

III

An approach developed by Douglas Allen in this respect has much to commend in it. Allen first identifies "[f]ive characteristics of philosophical phenomenology, which have had particular relevance for the phenomenology of religion,"[5] each of which stands in need of at least a brief explication. These were listed earlier in Chapter IV but need to be examined in more detail here.

1. *Descriptive Nature:* The emphasis here lies on the description of experience as direct and intuitional rather than processed and conceptual.[6]

2. *Opposition to Reductionism:* At the time the movement arose, "psychologism," or the attempt to reduce all phenomena to the psychological, was in vogue. On the other hand, empiricism was more inclined to take phenomena into account as observed than phenomena as experienced. These tendencies are characterised as

4 See Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion in Two Volumes* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983), Vol. 1, pp. 1–24.

5 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, p. 274.

6 *Ibid.* He goes on to say: "Phenomenology attempts to describe the nature of phenomena, the way appearances manifest themselves, and the essential structures at the foundation of human experience. As contrasted with most schools of philosophy, which assumed that the rational alone is real and which hence had a philosophical preoccupation with the rational faculties and with conceptual analysis, phenomenology focused on accurately describing the totality of phenomenal manifestations in human experience."

reductionistic either because they reduce one phenomenon to another or the whole of it to a part of it. Philosophical phenomenology resisted such tendencies.

3. *Intentionality:* Intentionality is a technical term which "refers to the property of all consciousness as consciousness of something."[7] It can be brought into relation with our usual understanding of the term by recognising that, by consciously engaging in an act, a person tries to achieve an intended state of consciousness. It also carries the connotation that if consciousness is always consciousness of a thing, then this consciousness as such deserves as much recognition as the thing itself, if not more.[8]

4. *Bracketing:* The other word often used in this context is *epoché* "derived from the Greek *epęchô*, 'I hold back'. In effect it means 'stoppage', suspension of judgement, the exclusion from one's mind of every possible presupposition."[9] It also means something more than that. It does not stop at the *suspension* of one's belief, but involves an active *participation* in the experience which is being encountered, unencumbered by preexisting or superimposed ideas, beliefs, presuppositions or suspicions. G. van der Leeuw explains that

> [t]he term *epoche* is a technical expression employed in current Phenomenology by Husserl and other philosophers. It implies that no judgment is expressed concerning the objective world, which is thus placed 'between brackets', as it were. All phenomena, therefore, are considered solely as they are presented to the mind, without any further aspects such as their real existence, or their value being taken into account; in this way the observer restricts himself to pure description systematically pursued, himself adopting the attitude of complete intellectual suspense, or of abstention from all judgment regarding these controversial topics.[10]

7 *Ibid.*, p. 275.

8 See Evan M. Zuesse, "The Role of Intentionality in the Phenomenology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985), pp. 51–74.

9 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

10 G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, p. 646. It is worth adding that "[s]ometimes the *epoche* is formulated in terms of the goal of a completely presuppositionless science or philosophy, but most phenomenologists have interpreted such bracketing as the goal of freeing the phenomenologist from unexamined presuppositions, or of rendering explicit and clarifying our presuppositions, rather than completely denying their existence. The phenomenological *epoche*, whether as the technical Husserlian 'transcendental reduction' or in its other variations, is not simply 'performed' by phenomenologists; it must involve some method of self-criticism and intersubjective testing allowing insight into structure and meanings" (Douglas Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 275).

5. *Eidetic Vision:* In its Husserlian understanding with which we are concerned here it means the 'intuition of essences.' It is "[o]ften described as 'eidetic vision' or 'eidetic reduction', [and] is related to the Greek term *eidos*, which Husserl adopted from its Platonic meaning to designate 'universal essences'. Such essences express the 'whatness' of things, the necessary and invariant features of phenomena that allow us to recognize phenomena as phenomena of a certain kind."[11]

The nature of the relationship between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion has never been clearly defined. It is in this ambiguous context that the identification of the aspects of philosophical phenomenology drawn upon by phenomenologists of religion seems to provide a promising start. This becomes clear upon investigating the current state of the art in this matter and the ambiguity which invests it. For instance, Pettersson and Åkerberg have this to say on the general issue:

> An examination of the phenomenological works published in the thirties and later within the field of the science of religion does not reveal many direct impulses from Husserl's philosophy. Of course, influences are found regarding the general approaches, and the scholars have not been unfamiliar with the main concepts of his thinking. For instance, even if van der Leeuw does not directly quote any passage from Husserl's work, it is clear that he knew the main thoughts of this important philosopher of phenomenology ... However, we must bear in mind that it is difficult to estimate influences from one scholar upon another, for most scholars have a tendency to assimilate different ideas, the origin of which is impossible to determine with certainty.[12]

11 *Ibid.*, p. 275.

12 Olof Pettersson and Hans Åkerberg, *Interpreting Religious Phenomena: Studies with Reference to the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. Anders Dallby and Gunilla Florby (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1981), p. 13.

Douglas Allen averred in the case of Eliade that "we are aware of no interpreter who has shown a relationship between Eliade's methodology and philosophical phenomenology,"[13] a situation he tried to rectify. Similarly, it is said of C. Jouco Bleeker that although "he frequently uses such technical terms" as *epoché* and *eidetic vision* "in gaining insight into religious structures," he also at the same time acknowledges that although these "terms are borrowed from the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl and his school, ... they are used by the phenomenology of religion in only a figurative sense."[14]

It might therefore be worthwhile to identify some phenomenologists of religion and comment on their use of the characteristics of philosophical phenomenology identified earlier. It is important that we identify scholars who would, some differences of opinion notwithstanding, be accepted by most scholars of religion as 'phenomenologists of religion', as distinguished from philosophical phenomenologists studying religion, a category to which at least some of the names identified by Jacques Waardenburg in his *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion*, in its section on "Perspectives on a Phenomenological Study of Religion," seem to belong.[15] One might also add at this point the pertinent observation that "though few philosophical phenomenologists have had much interest in religious phenomena, some of the vocabulary of philosophical phenomenology and, in several cases, some of its methodology have influenced the phenomenology of religion."[16]

IV

Phenomenologists of religion employ all or some of the five features listed earlier. In fact, one could distinguish among them, and the understanding of the phenomenology of religion among scholars of

13 Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Direction* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), p. 108.

14 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, p. 278.

15 Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1973), Vol. I, pp. 654, 663. Thus the work of Max Scheler and Gaston Berger could belong here.

16 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, pp. 275–276.

religion, by identifying how they employ these characteristics or features in their operations or definitions.

Some scholars emphasise one of the five characteristics over and above the rest. For instance, Mariasusai Dhavamony accords the pride of place to *eidetic vision*. He writes:

> The phenomenological method does not just yield a mere description of the phenomena studied, as it is sometimes alleged, nor does it pretend to explain the philosophical essence of the phenomena; for phenomenology of religion is neither merely descriptive nor normative, as we have explained before. But it does give us the inner meaning of a religious phenomenon as it is lived and experienced by religious men. This inner meaning can be said to constitute the essence of the phenomenon; but then the word essence should be understood correctly; what we mean is the empirical essence that is in question here. Phenomenology of religion is an empirical science, a human science which makes use of the results of other human sciences such as religious psychology, religious sociology and anthropology. Still more, we can even say that phenomenology of religion is closer to the philosophy of religion than any other human sciences which study the religious phenomena, for it studies the religious phenomena in their specific aspect of religiousness.[17]

Towards the end of this passage Dhavamony seems to begin to allude to "opposition to reductionism" as a characteristic of phenomenology of religion as well; the main thrust of the passage, however, pertains to 'essence'. The word must be understood carefully. Phenomenologists of religion have sometimes differed on whether 'essence' is phenomenological or philosophical in nature. For instance, W. Brede Kristensen disregards 'essence' as part of his phenomenology because it "is a philosophical concept."[18] However, the procedure he prescribes for phenomenological understanding seems to correspond closely to Husserlian *eidos*. For he writes:

> Take for example such a characteristic religious phenomenon as prayer. In every religion it has a different form and a different character, but there is no single religion that informs us completely about the religious

17 Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Phenomenology of Religion* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1973), p. 27.

18 W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. J. B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 9.

need which has led to the practice of prayer. We are acquainted with 'magic prayer', often connected with sacred rites (sacrifices, for example) which are intended to ensure the effectiveness of prayer or at least to strengthen the compelling power of prayer. But besides this first type there is 'spiritual prayer' that signifies surrender to God's will and from this surrender draws spiritual power. But in both cases we speak of 'prayer'. Now it is the task of Phenomenology of Religion to answer the question of what we should understand by the concept 'prayer' and what is common to its various forms.[19]

One finds in Kristensen a blending of *epoché* with *eidos* as it were, though he does not use these words. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> It can be said just as truly that all religious data, seen more deeply, are held in common. If we but pay attention to their religious significance, they prove not to be alien to us, and certainly not to other believers. Consider, for instance, the many nature gods, such as Osiris, Demeter and Athene. As soon as we learn to understand their essence, the alien element disappears, and they correspond to feelings and insights which are echoed in ourselves. Just for this reason we can understand that which is alien. This is the case with all religious ideas and practices as soon as we comprehend them in their true significance. Seen more deeply, therefore, everything is held in common. Nothing and everything. It is clear that by following this path we do not learn to know the essence of religion.[20]

If, however, 'essence' is to be considered a philosophical rather than a phenomenological category, in terms of our analysis Kristensen concentrates on *epoché* par excellence, out of the five characteristics. The same seems to hold for Friedrich Heiler (1892–1967) as well, as a phenomenologist, for he too, like Kristensen, emphasized empathy, and empathy and *epoché* are arguably two sides of the same coin.

Another phenomenologist who may be pre-eminently associated with one of the five characteristics is Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), for the "insistence on the unique *a priori* quality of the religious experience points to Otto's antireductionism."[21] How emphatic Otto is

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.
[21] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, p. 277.

on the point takes even one who is familiar with his views sometimes by surprise. Otto cites approvingly Kant's distinction between that part "which we receive through impressions" and "that which our own faculty of cognition supplies from itself, sense-impressions *giving merely the occasion*." Otto unhesitatingly adds that "the numinous is of the latter kind."[22] And this after he has already emphasised its *sui generis* nature at some length:

> It follows from what has been said that the 'holy' in the fullest sense of the word is a combined, complex category, the combining elements being its rational and non-rational components. But in *both* – and the assertion must be strictly maintained against all Sensationalism and Naturalism – it is a *purely a priori* category.
>
> The rational ideas of Absoluteness, Completion, Necessity, and Substantiality, and no less so those of the good as an objective value, objectively binding and valid, are not to be 'evolved' from any sort of sense-perception. And the notions of 'epigenesis', 'heterogony', or whatever other expression we may choose to denote our compromise and perplexity, only serve to conceal the problem, the tendency to take refuge in a Greek terminology being here, as so often, nothing but an avowal of one's own insufficiency. Rather, seeking to account for the ideas in question, we are referred away from all sense-experience back to an original and undeprivable capacity of the mind implanted in the 'pure reason' independently of all perception.[23]

The same seems to hold true of C. Jouco Bleeker (1898–1983). He seems to basically use the word in its first sense – that of descriptive phenomenology and that too without the depth associated with it in philosophical phenomenology. He flies too low here, associating descriptive phenomenology with preparation of monographs etc. Then he flies too high when he associates the phenomenology of religion with the concepts of *theória* which "discloses the essence and significance of the facts;" *logos* which "penetrates into the structure of different forms of religious life" and *entelechia* which represents "the course of events in which the essence is realized by its manifes-

[22] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 117.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 116. But see E. Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley, "Crisis of Conscience, Riddle of Identity: Making Space for a Cognitive Approach to Religious Phenomena," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXI:2 (Summer 1993), p. 209.

tations."[24] Bleeker, however, can clearly be brought in relation to *epoché* inasmuch as he states:

> I sometimes wonder whether the adherents of the religions which we are studying would recognize their belief in the picture we present of them. This means that the true evaluation of methods would be to retain only those methods which let religious people themselves testify their faith.[25]

In the case of some scholars, not one but two of the five characteristics may be regularly associated with phenomenology of religion out of the pentad of distinguishing features of philosophical phenomenology. These are the two which sound somewhat exotic on account of their Greek connections, namely, *epoché* and *eidetic vision.* Thus, while assessing the influence of Husserlian phenomenology on the phenomenology of religion, Eric J. Sharpe remarks that "while it is difficult to be sure of Husserl's influence," "nevertheless Husserl did provide future phenomenologists of religion with two important concepts, or principles of understanding *epochê* and *eidetic vision.*"[26] Geo Widengren claims that "van der Leeuw was the first to formulate two principles of great value in phenomenological research."[27] He proceeds to identify these principles as those of *epoché* and *eidos.* Otto Pettersson and Hans Åkerberg concur that Husserl's most important contribution to the phenomenology of religion "seems to consist in providing it with two main concepts, or principles of understanding, viz. *epoche* and *eidetic vision.*"[28]

The phenomenological method of van der Leeuw will be examined in greater depth subsequently, but it can be readily conceded at this stage that his explication of the phenomenological method in the study of religion closely blends *epoche* and *eidos*, as is clear from the following passage:

[24] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, p. 279.

[25] Lauri Honko, ed., *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), p. 177.

[26] Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

[27] Geo Widengren, "An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion," in Walter H. Capps, ed., *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972), p. 143.

[28] Olof Petterson and Hans Åkerberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13.

> Phenomenology, therefore, is neither metaphysics, nor the comprehension of empirical reality. It observes *restraint* (the *epoche*), and its understanding of events depends on its employing "brackets". Phenomenology is concerned only with "phenomena", that is with "appearance"; for it, there is nothing whatever "behind" the phenomenon. This restraint, still further, implies no mere methodological device, no cautious procedure, but the distinctive characteristic of man's whole attitude to reality. Scheler has very well expressed this situation: "to be human means to hurl a forcible 'No!' at this sort of reality. Buddha realized this when he said how magnificent it is to *contemplate* everything, and how terrible it is to *be*: Plato, too, in connecting the contemplation of ideas to a diverting of the soul from the sensuous content of objects, and to the diving at the soul into its own depths, in order to find the 'origins' of things. Husserl, also, implies nothing different than this when he links the knowledge of ideas with 'phenomenological reduction' – that is a 'crossing through' or 'bracketing' of (the accidental) coefficients of the existence of objects in the world in order to obtain their 'essentia'." This of course involves no preference of some "idealism" or other to some kind of "realism". On the contrary: it is simply maintained that man can be positive only in turning away from things, as they are given to him chaotically and formlessly, and by first assigning them form and meaning.[29]

Douglas Allen notes that of the five characteristics listed by him, (1), (2) and (5) seem to be the ones most widely accepted by phenomenologists of religion although in some cases, as in the following, all five may be in evidence.[30]

Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) constitutes an interesting case in this context. It is sometimes disputed whether he is a phenomenologist of religion,[31] and indeed he has heen anecdotally known to prefer being identified as a hermeneut. It has, however, been reasonably established that although Eliade may be more than a phenomenologist of religion, he is not less.[32] In fact each of the five characteristics of philosophical phenomenology are drawn upon by him, as becomes clear from Allen's analysis of his position.

[29] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Part II, pp. 675–676.

[30] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, p. 275.

[31] Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion*, p. 109.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 107 ff.

The *descriptive nature* of philosophical phenomenology is one feature of philosophical phenomenology which finds a place in Eliade's phenomenology of religion. It should be clearly grasped here that description in this context does not mean *mere* description – which may well belong to the realm of history or morphology. Philosophical phenomenology regards description as a prelude to understanding what is described. The word description also carries with it the hidden adjective of 'unbiased' description, as providing the proper context for all authentic understanding. Hence Eliade is a phenomenologist "because of his concern with meaning;"[33] in fact it is this pervasive concern with meaning which may account for Eliade's preference for being seen as belonging to the circle of hermeneutics rather than phenomenology of religion.

Similarly, opposition to reductionism is a persistent theme in Eliade's approach to the study of religion. A kind of perverse proof of this is provided by the fact that he is the favoured target of reductionists:

> The methodological assumption of the irreducibility of the sacred can be seen as arising from Eliade's criticism of past reductionist positions. In fact, this antireductionism is the predominant reason for Eliade's rejection of previous approaches. We need not repeat Eliade's detailed criticisms. One recalls that scholars of 'the first period', utilizing certain assumed norms (rationalist, positivist, etc.), usually forced their data into unilinear evolutionary schemes. The sociologist and the psychologist of 'the second period' opened up new dimensions of the sacred, but Eliade criticized them for reducing the meaning of the religious to its sociological or psychological analysis. Similarly, Eliade readily acknowledged his debt to the diffusionist and the functionalist, but tracing the diffusion or determining the function of a religious phenomenon does not exhaust its meaning.[34]

The role of intentionality in Mircea Eliade's methodology has been identified with precision by Douglas Allen with the help of David Rasmussen who, Allen thinks, is "one of the few interpreters

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[34] Hans H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 17–18. Also see p. 27, etc.

who have uncovered some of the philosophical significance of Eliade's methodology."[35] It is pointed out that when "Eliade examines his data, they do reveal a certain intentionality. He will attempt to recreate imaginatively the conditions for 'intentional configuration' which expresses the specific existential orientation of *homo religiosus.*"[36] As David Rasmussen explains: "The attempt to understand the sacred as an irreducible form is accompanied by the technical attempt to capture its *intentional* mode ... Eliade's second hermeneutic principle, the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, is introduced precisely to capture this intentional characteristic of the sacred modality."[37] In fact such intentionality follows logically from the opposition to reductionism. "Eliade has insisted on the irreducibility of the sacred but has not provided the hermeneutic framework for perceiving the irreducible manifestations. He must now recreate imaginatively the conditions for the manifestations of the sacred; in doing this, he seems to adopt a phenomenological approach by focusing upon the *intentionality* of his data."[38]

These procedures presuppose bracketing (*Einklammerung*) or *epoché*. The issue at stake is elegantly illustrated by Joseph Bettis with the help of an example from everyday life:

> Some insight into the way in which we can experience our environment in different ways may be gained from examining the way in which trans-experiential factors limit, modify, distort, and clarify our experience. We all know that experience can be deceiving. For example, I see a girl across the street and recognize her as my friend. As she comes closer, I realize that she is not my friend at all but a total stranger. But, earlier, I really "experienced" seeing my friend. In this case certain conditioned reflexes functioned as perceptive factors which determined my experience to such a degree that the immediate perception was distorted. The mental expectations that I brought to the experience determined its content. These expectations can be called trans-experiential in the sense

[35] Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion*, p. 119. He says this with the following paper of Rasmussen in mind: "Mircea Eliade: Structural Hermeneutics and Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 12:2 (1968), pp. 138–146.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

that they are not part of the content of the present experience hut are factors which condition and shape that experience.[39]

Epoché is an attempt to eliminate such intrusion or "noise." Indeed, as Allen observes,

> Eliade's methodological principle of irreducibility is really an insistence upon a phenomenological *epoche*. One recalls that Husserl's phenomenological *epoche* was directed against reductionism. By 'bracketing' or suspending the interpretations we normally place on phenomena, the phenomenologist attempts to consider phenomena 'just as phenomena', 'to disclose and clarify the meaning of phenomena, that is of whatever presents itself.'[40]

The last of the five items which remains to be examined is the *eidetic vision*. Eliade has moved further in this direction than many other phenomenologists of religion. It is also at this point that an important difference emerges between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion. In order to identify this difference clearly one must first describe the method employed in philosophical phenomenology for identifying the 'essence' or eidetic vision. As noted in an earlier chapter, this process of the 'intuition of essences' (*Wesensschau*) involves dissociating the particular from the essential.[41] The essential 'whatness', however, can only be determined by surveying a series of particular data. When "the universal essence is grasped, the phenomenologist has achieved the eidetic intuition, or the fulfilled *Wesensschau*."[42]

Douglas Allen provides illustrations from the study of religion to illustrate both these points. The first point is illustrated with a reference to monotheism with the following remark: "For example, the variation of a great variety of religious phenomena" – read 'free association' – in a religious context "may disclose that the unique structures of monotheism do not constitute the essential core or

[39] Joseph Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 201.

[40] Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion*, p. 115.

[41] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[42] *Ibid.*

universal structure of all religious experience."[43] The second point is illustrated with reference to transcendence: "For example, free variation might reveal that certain essential structures of 'transcendence' constitute an invariant core of religious experience. When the universal essence is grasped, the phenomenologist has achieved the eidetic intuition, or fulfilled *Wesensschau*."[44]

The crucial point of difference between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion lies in this that "most phenomenologists" – Eliade included – "who use a method of *Wesensschau* propose that historical phenomena have a kind of priority, that we must substitute for Husserl's imaginary variation an actual variation of historical data, and that the particular phenomena are not constituted by us but are the source of our constitution and judgement."[45]

V

It was Mircea Eliade himself who accorded pride of place to Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950) as a phenomenologist. Unlike many other phenomenologists, van der Leeuw himself took the trouble, like Husserl, of explicitly describing his method. We have then the fortunate circumstance of possessing two clear articulations of the 'method' of philosophical phenomenology and that of the 'phenomenology of religion.'

Frank Whaling summarises Husserl's method as follows:

> [He] conceived this *epoché* as unfolding in five stages. First, there was the putting into brackets of psychologism, one's personal emotions, one's likes and dislikes, in order to get back to what is given; second, there was the putting into brackets of theories and ideas in order to get back to things in themselves; third, there was the putting into brackets of all philosophy in order to isolate the phenomena that appears; fourth, having performed this threefold *epoché*, there was the further step of getting behind the externals of phenomena in order to get through to

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] *Ibid.*

their inwardness, the technical term for this process being the exercise of *Einfühlung* (empathy); fifth, there was the final step of getting behind the accidents of phenomena in order to unfold their essence (*eidos*), the technical term for this process being 'eidetic vision.'[46]

G. van der Leeuw offers his own summary of his method as follows: "the phenomenology of religion must in the first place assign names:- sacrifice, prayer, saviour, myth, *etc.* In this way it appeals to appearances. Secondly, it must interpolate these appearances within its own life and experience them systematically. And in the third place, it must withdraw to one side, and endeavour to observe what appears while adopting the attitude of intellectual suspense. Fourthly, it attempts to clarify what it has seen, and again (combining all its previous activities) try to comprehend what has appeared. Finally, it must confront chaotic 'reality', and its still uninterpreted signs, and ultimately testify to what it has understood."[47]

The two may now be placed alongside in a tabular form as follows:

Philosophical Phenomenology: à la Husserl	Phenomenology of Religion: à la van der Leeuw
(1) Bracketing emotions;	(1) Assigning names;
(2) Bracketing Theories;	(2) Interpolation;
(3) Bracketing Philosophy;	(3) *Epoche*;
(4) *Einfühlung* (empathy);	(4) Empathic understanding;
(5) *Eidos* (eidetic vision).	(5) Testify to structure which is "reality significantly organized,"[48] hence *eidos*.

A comparison of the two sides of the table clearly demonstrates why philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion are two *different* animals of the same species. First of all, the first item on van der Leeuw's list clearly emphasises the *comparative* nature of the phenomenology of religion. It is significant that at one point Eliade dissociates himself from philosophical phenomenology

[46] Frank Whaling, ed., *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 211–212.
[47] G. van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 688.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 672.

because such a phenomenologist, according to him, "in principle rejects any work of comparison."[49] Douglas Allen points out how this represents only one strand in philosophical phenomenology.[50] The point worth noting is that although it may be possible to undertake a phenomenology of religion of a single item (see Chapter V), *typically* the phenomenology of religion is comparative in nature and emerged in the context of comparative religion. This is not the case with philosophical phenomenology.

The second point of difference between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion rests on the fact that while philosophical phenomenology confronts the world as the other, phenomenology of religion confronts the other as its world. This point is closely connected with the first, in fact it follows from it. Phenomenology of religion tries to understand not the world as disclosed to us but typically the world of the believer of *another* religious tradition as it is disclosed to *him* or *her*. What Kristensen says of the 'historian' applies really to the 'phenomenologist of religion' in this context:

> The historian seeks to understand, and he is able to do that in an approximate way, approximate, but no more. By means of empathy he tries to relive in his own experience that which is "alien", and that, too, he can only approximate. This imaginative reexperiencing of a situation strange to us is a form of representation, and not reality itself, for that always asserts itself with sovereign authority. We can even assume such an outside position in respect to our own spiritual inheritance; we can form a more or less clear picture of our own national character, and we often do so. But then we always feel the shortcomings of our own formulation; the representation is always something else than the reality. The "existential" nature of the religious datum is never disclosed by research. That cannot be defined. Here we see the limit to the validity of historical research. But recognizing a limit of validity is not to deny the value of this research.[51]

Philosophical phenomenology, on the other hand, probes the existential nature of any datum directly – not indirectly as the

[49] Cited in Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion*, p. 110.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

phenomenology of religion is compelled to on account of typically being a second-order study.

The issue of interpolation arises in this context, when the phenomenologist of religion is asked to place himself in the position of the believer. *This question does not even arise in philosophical phenomenology* but has given rise to the following issue in the phenomenology of religion. Is some similar experience necessary on the part of the phenomenologist of religion before the phenomenologist can presume to empathise with the believer?[52]

VI

To conclude: there are strong historical and methodological links between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion, and although traces of family resemblances surface now and then, they do not seem to belong to the same nuclear family.[53]

One may in conclusion also address a perspective from the opposite end of the spectrum. If one basic difference between philosophical phenomenology and the phenomenology of religion consists of the fact that the former relies on imaginal variation and the latter on concrete data to arrive at the invariant core of the phenomenon, then wherein lies the difference "between investigating a historical 'fact' about religion(s) and understanding a religious 'phenomenon'?"[54] Two factors lend added weight to the question. The first is the reliance of the phenomenology of religion for its data on what have been variously called historical-descriptive, historical-critical, historical-philological, factual-descriptive, historical-factual or nomenclatively similar studies.[55] The second is the possibility of an *empirical phenomenology of religion*, which has already been alluded to in these pages.[56]

52 See Geo Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 151; Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," *op. cit.*, pp. 281–282; etc.

53 For a very different kind of wrestling with this issue see Antonio Barbosa da Silva, *The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem: An Analysis of the Theoretical Background of the Phenomenology of Religion in General and of M. Eliade's Phenomenological Approach in Particular* (Uppsala, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1982).

54 Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983), Vol. I, p. 41.

The phenomenology of religion, it should be clear by now, is both more abstract than merely the empirical study of religion and more concrete than the philosophical study of religion. That is to say, it relies on empirical and historical data but is not *confined* to them as it seeks 'ideal' configurations. On the other hand, it does not proceed like philosophical studies from given propositions but rather from given data whose 'religiousness' it does not question, as philosophy might so that while 'philosophical' in the sense of allowing free rein for thought, it is not *confined* by philosophical presuppositions either. The shifting understandings of the words *epoché* and *eidetic vision* in the context of the relationship of the phenomenology of religion to empirical data-gathering on the one hand and philosophical phenomenology on the other might clinch the issue as one moves towards a conclusion. Thus while *epoché* and *eidetic vision* are applied in philosophy to anything that falls in the realm of perceptual phenomena in general, in the phenomenology of religion they are applied to religious data in general and to the data of a religious tradition in particular, involving the suspension of judgement in the truth or otherwise of the religious claim and to the grasping of *its* 'essence.' The application of the twin principles is thus more concrete and of a different texture than is typically the case in philosophical phenomenology. Similarly, from the empirical side, "through the use of epoche and the search for objectivity, phenomenology [of religion] does seem to share the aims of descriptive science but on closer examination it appears, that 'epoche' and eidetic vision are neither critical nor objective in the commonly understood sense of critical objectivity. Just as *epoche* suspends criticism, eidetic vision suspends objectivity.'"[57] The phenomenology of religion, although clinging to the same rafts of *epoché* and *eidetic vision* thus navigates its passage between the shores of a purely philosophical and a purely empirical phenomenology.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 36–38.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 89. A passage from M. Dhavamony is cited here, which has already been cited in section IV.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 40, where Willard Oxtoby is cited.

CHAPTER XII

From the Phenomenology of Religion to a Religious Way of Studying Religion?

I

Any attempt to propose a religious method for studying religion is likely to get caught in a crossfire. It will be attacked by those who are non-religious as too religious and by those who are religious, that is, pious,[1] as not sufficiently religious, an attitude which has already found wry expression in the saying that comparative religion only ends up by making one comparatively religious. To create room for the proposal to survive, one must at once state what it is *not*, before it could be proposed what it might be.

To begin with, the methods prevalent in religious studies for studying religion in general should not be identified with the confessional method, which is theological in nature. The distinction drawn between '*religious* sociology' and the 'sociology of religion' immediately recognises this, with religious sociology usually implying some "prior commitment on the part the investigator."[2]

Even more to the point is the distinction between theology and the phenomenology of religion, a distinction recognised even by such avid practitioners of both as Gerardus van der Leeuw.[3] The further

1 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), p. 48.

2 D. H. J. Morgan, "Sociology of Religion," in S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons and Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), p. 583.

3 See Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 232–233; G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, pp. 687–688; J. B. Carman, "The Theology of a Phenomenologist:

the point is pressed the clearer it becomes. G. van der Leeuw does not, like Friedrich Heiler (1892–1967), press phenomenology in service of "evangelical catholicity."[4] Nevertheless, there seem to be two views regarding van der Leeuw's stance on the relationship between theology and philosophy: (1) that for him phenomenology was "a form of theological propaedeutics;"[5] (2) that in him "phenomenology and dogmatic considerations, and possibly some others as well, are combined. Thus it is hard to tell if the autonomy of both methods has been preserved."[6]

The point is made by Geo Widengren that van der Leeuw did not always follow his own method![7] It is clear, however, that van der Leeuw clearly distinguished between phenomenology and theology, even when he speaks of pressing the former in the service of the latter,[8] so that it is possible to consider van der Leeuw as a phenomenologist,[9] notwithstanding the other dimensions of his work and his alleged failure to apply his own phenomenological method. The point of central interest here is not how true he is to his own

An Introduction to the Theology of Gerardus van der Leeuw," in *The Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 29:3 (April 1965), pp. 13–42; but also see Hans H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution. A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 42.

4 Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 11, p. 278; Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1973), Vol. I, pp. 460ff; Annemarie Schimmel, "Heiler, Friedrich (1892–1967)," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, pp. 249–250. Should this point arouse skepticism see Friedrich Heiler, "The History of Religions as a Preparation for the Co-operation of Religions," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 132–160.

5 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 233; Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion between Reality and Idea," *Numen* 19 (1972), p. 167.

6 J. B. Carman, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

7 Geo Widengren, "An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion," in Walter H. Capps, *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972), p. 143.

8 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

9 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard T. Trask (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961), p. 232; Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion between Reality and Idea," p. 162.

method, but the clear distinction he draws between theology and phenomenology. It has been contended that "not only Otto or Eliade, but those in the broader phenomenological tradition as well, have been eager to carry on a theological campaign under the banner of religious science."[10] The charge is difficult to sustain. Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr. begin the introduction to their recent collection of readings on the phenomenology of religion with the remark that "the academic study of religion has clearly established its independence from the theological study of religion" and demonstrate how the "phenomenological study of religion has contributed to this development."[11]

The point may be further clarified by distinguishing among four descriptions of people who might in some sense be said to belong to a religious tradition: (1) believers; (2) insiders; (3) adherents; and (4) participants. Each of these constitutes a successively more inclusive category. The person most committed to the confessional position is the believer. However, not all the followers of a tradition are believers of the deepest dye. Many would consider themselves insiders to a tradition in terms of their familiarity with it, which may not have matured to the point of commitment within them which would entitle them to consider themselves as believers. Yet they may not wish to place themselves outside the pale of their tradition either, as it might well provide a fulfilling cultural comfort zone. However, just because someone is not fully committed to a tradition, or does feel fully comfortable within it, does not mean that the person is

[10] Daniel L. Pals, "Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?," *Journal of The American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987), pp. 274ff.; Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion between Reality and Idea," p. 198; C.J. Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," *Numen* 38 (1971), pp. 9–29; etc.

[11] Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., eds., *Experience of the Sacred: Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992), p. 1; also see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Theology in the University" (*CSSR Bulletin* 22:2 [April 1993], pp. 34–39) and "A Reply to Donald Wiebe" (*Council of the Study of Religion Bulletin* 23:1 [February 1994], pp. 6–10) and Donald Wiebe "On Theology and Religious Studies: A response to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza" (*CSSR Bulletin* 23:1 [February 1994], pp. 3–6).

prepared to abandon it. Such people may be happy to consider themselves formally adherents of a religious tradition – as when filling out census forms – without regarding themselves either as insiders or believers in it. Finally, all of them – the believer, the insider and the adherent may participate in their religious tradition to various degrees. I am, however, using the term "participant" here to indicate the participant-observer, who may conform to some of the practices of a religious tradition *without* formally even being a member of it. Given the various degrees of approximation the faithful may exhibit towards their faith, one might wish to be less dogmatic in the matter of a "confessional" perspective on the tradition and less sceptical in regarding the viability of a "phenomenological" perspective. One may also wish to note that in terms of the four fundamental modes of religious discourse identified in the Introduction, confessional discourse only occurs among insiders, notwithstanding the difficulties involved in such a binary classification.[12]

The religious method of studying religion should also not be confused with reductive methods in the study of religion, such as the psychological and the sociological. Such disciplines may "well contribute much to the understanding of religion, each in its own terms. Yet each has a central focus *other* than religion as such to which it may tend to reduce religious phenomena."[13] This point may also be clarified with the help of a diagram:

Object ↑		Subject ↑
	Objective Explanation Subjective Understanding	
↓ Object		↓ Subject

The insider may be looked upon either as a subject whose behaviour needs to be understood, or as an object whose behaviour needs to be explained. When a student of religion respects the dimension of interiority and approaches the adherent of a religious tradition as

[12] Ross N. Reat et al., "Insiders and Outsiders in the Study of Religious Traditions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1984), pp. 459–476.

[13] Charles E. Vernoff, "Naming the Game: A Question of the Field," *Council of the Study of Religion Bulletin* 14:4 (1983), pp. 109–113.

his or her subject, then he or she relates to him or her as subject to subject. Here, when the member (subject) of one tradition wants to understand a member (subject) of another subjectively; then this mode may be briefly described as subjective. While the "detached academic intellect, surveying his material impersonally,"[14] stands at one end of the spectrum, at the other end stands the scholar seeking to understand rather than explain, as one involved in the perilous project involving subjectivity.[15] Such subjectivity or self-reflexivity can have three referents: (1) the subjectivity or self-reflexivity of the insider; (2) the subjectivity or self-reflexivity of the outsider; and (3) the relationship between the two. The *exclusivist insider* claims that the outsider can never understand him or her because the outsider cannot, by definition, share the insider's subjectivity, while the insider can only understand the outsider in his or her, that is, the insider's own terms.[16] The *exclusivist outsider* claims that he or she can never share the insider's subjectivity and can only understand the insider in his or her, that is, the outsider's own terms.[17] The outcome is that both the insiders and the outsiders, according to the pattern presented above, proclaim their own subjectivities as exclusive, as mutually exclusive, so that the only way the other can be understood (the outsider by the insider and the insider by the outsider) is exclusively in terms of becoming subjected to the insider's subjectivity or to the outsider's subjectivity. Enter the phenomenologist of religion, who maintains that the insider's subjectivity can at least be asymptotically approached by the outsider and may even coincide with it, although the two can never be numerically identical. If A finds snow coming through the window and tells B, who is indoors, that the snow makes her feel cold, A's perception of cold and B's inference about it are identical in content, although A is not identical with B. This *sui generis* nature of A's experience can both be acknowledged and appreciated by B, according to the phenomenology of religion.

[14] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither – and Why?," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 44.

[15] Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984), pp. 688–690.

[16] Daniel L. Pals, *op. cit.*, pp. 263–264.

A comparable historical trajectory can be discerned on both the confessional and reductive sides of the fence. In terms of confessional study, the *sui generis* component, uniquely Christian in Hendrik Kraemer, is broadened through Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto to end up as Mircea Eliade's sacred. Schleiermacher's 'sense of absolute dependence,' is theistic; Otto's 'holy' moves beyond it to incorporate other forms of religiosity, and Eliade is able to also incorporate the primal religions in the study of religion through the concept of the 'sacred.' The charge that the phenomenologists of religion conflate the theological and the phenomenological has its roots here.[18] But for the phenomenologist the *sui generis* element now becomes empirical, in terms of the believer's belief.

In a parallel way, in the reductive study of religion, the model of the natural sciences was first taken over by the social sciences and then, in a further move, applied to religion in search for causal explanations. When the experience *from* one person makes its way to another, as when it is passed over from the insider to the outsider, it should have the same *interpretive* force for the outsider as it has for the believer, in order for it not to be reductive and to qualify as *interpretation*; however, when the experience is reduced from one realm of *explanation* to the other, it must have comparable explanatory power *in the realm it is reduced to*, as it had in the realm it has been reduced from. That is to say: If, in the world of phenomenology of religion, it makes sense to say that the totem is associated with taboos to maintain its sanctity, it should make equal sense, in sociology of religion, to say that it is society which prohibits its members from performing certain acts to maintain social cohesion.

It has sometimes been claimed by reductionists that by moving the explanation from the sacred to the secular realm, social sciences universalise it in two ways: (1) by making it applicable beyond *one* religion and (2) by making it applicable beyond religion. However, a similar claim can be made by the religionists, that by extending the

[17] Robert A. Segal, "In Defence of Reductionism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (March 1983), pp. 97–124; Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43.

[18] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), passim.

understanding of a phenomenon in one religion to all religions, a comparable universality is achieved which might also even go beyond religion, as when the beauty pageants are understood as a secular way of worshipping Venus, and sports stadiums are seen as secular 'sacred' spaces.[19]

II

But to revert to the main theme: the religious method of studying religion should not be confused with the confessional. The fact that the ultimate truth question is bracketed in the former through *epoché*, and held as answered in the latter, constitutes the most obvious point of divergence. Moreover, in the confessional method, description is not principially divorced from endorsement.[20] In fact, description may not even be distinguished from endorsement. In the religious method of studying religion, description is allied to understanding but does not amount to endorsement. Understanding does not amount to endorsement any more than the psychiatrist who understands the nature of his or her patient's illness endorses it. He or she tries to cure it. As a practical matter, if religionists did not maintain this distinction and stand by it, they would be converting to the religion they are studying in droves. Some do, but the ones you would expect to most, the phenomenologists of religion, actually warn that one would cease to be a phenomenologist if one did.[21] Similarly, the religious method of studying religion must not be confused with the social-scientific methods of studying religion, when reductive in nature,[22] as indicated already.

[19] Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., eds., *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21.

[21] W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. John B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 7.

[22] David Wulff, "Psychological Approaches," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1985), Vol. II, pp. 21, 26, 43; Jarich Oosten, "Cultural Anthropological Approaches," *ibid.*, p. 260; Mircea Eliade, *The Quest* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), pp. 15–22; Wayne Proudfoot, *op. cit.*,

Religionists claim that their mode of study does not deviate from the self-understanding of the believers, while the reductive modes of study do, and this is one basis of distinguishing between these two. Social scientists have challenged this by pointing out that (a) even religionists such as Mircea Eliade, for instance, deviate from the self-understanding of the believers, according to both historians of religion[23] as well as social scientists,[24] and even according to their own admission;[25] and by claiming that (b) social scientists do not invariably deviate from the self-understanding of the believers, for even an explanation could be non-reductionistic: "It could either be the actor's own account of the origin of his or her religiosity or an observer's account. The accounts can even coincide."[26] Religionists make the counterclaim that if religionists exceed the self-understanding of the believers, they do so only on the basis of the categories *based* on the understanding of the believers, categories which themselves contribute to further such understanding,[27] while this is not the case with the methods of social sciences.[28] The reductionists then argue that while this criticism may apply to an earlier phase in the history of anthropology,[29] this is no longer the case even in social-scientific studies with the emphasis on field-work, and the evolution of the participant-observer method. It may be true that Bronislaw Malinowski, a major force in this transformation, himself was not as

pp. 190–192; Daniel Pals, "Reductionism and Belief: An Appraisal of Recent Attacks on the Doctrine of Irreducible Religion," *Journal of Religion* 66:1 (1986), pp. 18–36; Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 191–198.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[24] Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 147; Daniel Pals, "Reductionism and Belief: An Appraisal of Recent Attacks on the Doctrine of Irreducible Religion," p. 27.

[25] Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

[26] Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*, p. 53.

[27] Sumner B. Twiss and Walter A. Conser, Jr., eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

[28] Jarich Oosten, *op. cit.*, p. 234; etc.

[29] William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds., *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach* (Evanston, Ill. & Elmsford, N.Y.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1962), pp. 3–4.

scrupulous in his sympathy for the internal life of the members of a society as he was meticulous in detailing their external observances,[30] but this is not true of his successors. I maintain that there still remains a valid point of difference between the religionists and the social scientists in the way they approach the study of religion. Although the *believer may question the religionists, the religionist does not question the believers; but the social scientists do question the believer's understanding.*[31] The psychologists differ from the believer in regarding God as a father-figure; while the religionists differ from the believer in regarding, say the Ka'ba, as just another sacred place. But the religionist does not dispute with the believer that the Ka'ba is an absolntely unique sacred place, *for him or her.* It is this symmetry in the relationship between the religionists and the believers, which distinguishes the religionists from the social scientists, in the study of religion.

When comparative religionists offer an interpretation, which does not coincide with that of the believers, they in fact go *beyond* it, rather than *against* it. The social scientists go both beyond and against it. The explanations of the social scientists are substitutive, those of the comparative religionists additive; the social sciences are reductive, the comparative religionists are 'transductive;' the social scientists offer explanations from a secular realm, the comparative religionists, even when they go beyond the self-understanding of the believers, are operating in the same realm as the believers, the religious realm. The insight to be gained here is that just as there are different varieties of reductionism such as the sociological and the psychological, there can also be different kinds of nonreductionisms, such as the theological and the phenomenological, and there is no point in confusing one with the other in either case. In the theological method, a particular faith-stance is irreducible; in the phenomenological method any faith-stance is irreducible. The point may be explained as follows. Theological studies within a particular religion begin by accepting the faith-stance of the particular religion on its

30 Eric J. Sharpe, "Anthropology," in S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 86.

31 J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), p. 2; Daniel Pals, "Reductionism and Belief ...," p. 23.

own terms. Those who apply the phenomenological method similarly accept the faith-stance of the followers of a religion without question, or, more accurately, "bracket" any such question. One could argue that there is a subtle distinction involved here, in that theology *actively* accepts the faith stance of *one* religion, while phenomenology of religion does not *reject* the faith stance of any tradition. Both however do consider their respective faith stances as irreducible; they are however irreducible for different reasons. Theology accepts the proposition that the ultimate reality of religion is religious ontologically, and first hand. Phenomenology of religion accepts the same proposition, but empirically, and second hand. For it the ultimate reality of religion is religious because this is what the believers believe (which it believes not as such on its own bnt which it believes because the believers believe it to be so). Alternatively, one might distinguish between belief in *a* belief, from belief in *beliefs* and proceed on to belief in *belief* per se, as one moves from the study of a religious tradition to that of religious traditions, to that of religion per se.

It may thus be safely asserted that the religious method of studying religion is neither identical with the confessional nor with the social-scientific method and should not be confused with either. But the question remains: we know what it is not, but what is it?

III

With the decks thus cleared I would like to propose that the religious method of studying religion is one which accords with the insider's view. This, of course, sets off all kinds of alarm bells that we are according a privileged position to the insider, often referred to as the believer. W. B. Kristensen has been the most eloquent voice on this,[32] but while conceding that "the principle is an important one," Eric Sharpe[33] is critical of Kristensen's claim, in a passage cited earlier in

32 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, p. 228; Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 11, pp. 276–277.

33 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, p. 229.

the book. Sharpe tones down his criticism somewhat, however, by adding that Kristensen wished to "respect the integrity of the believer" and "to refrain from imposing on him his (the scholar's) own value judgments,"[34] but the point raised is an important one. This emphasis on the insider's understanding has led some to either question the validity of this position altogether,[35] or to criticise the insider's position as excessively privileged.[36] A more moderate and common position allows that approximation of the insider's position is possible and desirable[37], and even the possibility that such an approximation could be a very close one.[38] All of these positions are relevant. This tilt towards the insider's view should not be associated with phenomenology of religion *alone*. It is, in certain cases, as true of the phenomenological as the historical method, although the two have been distinguished from one another,[39] whether viewed in apposition or opposition.[40] It is remarkable that Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000), the major exponents respectively of these methods, both speak with one voice on this point, as will become clear from what follows.

The association of phenomenology of religion with the viewpoint of the insider is patent.[41] It may be useful, however, to recapitulate it briefly. Proudfoot braids the threads together when he comments that Eliade "praises van der Leeuw for respecting the peculiar intentionality of religious data and thus the irreducibility of religious representations."[42] If we supplement this comment with that of Preus that for Eliade, "the 'sacred' is something that can only be illustrated by collecting and classifying examples, it cannot be defined, analyzed, or explained, else it would not *be* sacred!,"[43] then the stage is set for the making of the next point, namely, that these positions are mirrored in the historical method as well. Wilfred Cantwell Smith states, like Eliade, that in the religious history of humanity "we do not see a person's faith, but see expressions of it. These are many and, as they accumulate in history, they constitute what we have called the various religious traditions."[44] He goes on to add: "Faith can be expressed – *more historically*: faith has been expressed, observably – in words, both prose and poetry; in patterns of deeds, both ritual and morality; in art, in institutions, in law, in community, in character … ."[45] All that remains to make phenomenology and history isomorphic is the comparability of the role of the insider. Wilfred Cantwell Smith spells it out clearly in the form of the following two propositions:

> First, there is an important epistemological point. In the study of a religion other than one's own, a knowledge of its institutions, formulations, and overt history may be derived from things. But if they are seen as clues to a personal quality of men's lives, then a sympathetic appreciation of this quality may at least in part be derived from having adherents of that faith as informants and perhaps even as friends. Of the various ways of finding out what something means to the person concerned, one way is to ask him …
>
> For I would proffer this as my second proposition: that no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers …
>
> … Anything that I say about Islam as a living faith is valid only in so far as Muslims can say "amen" to it.[46]

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34 *Ibid.*

35 J. Milton Yinger, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Daniel L. Pals, "Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55:2 (1987), p. 264.

36 Daniel L. Pals, "Reductionism and Belief …," pp. 32–33; "Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?," p. 264, note 6.

37 Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 148.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

39 Geo Widengren, *op. cit.*; Arvind Sharma, "An Inquiry Into the Nature of the Distinction Between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* 22 (1975), 81–95; Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*, p. 141.

40 W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–15; R. Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954); Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 177.

41 C. J. Bleeker, *The Sacred Bridge* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), pp. 11–12; Geo Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 150, note 29; Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 193, etc.

42 Wayne Proudfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

43 J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. xviii.

44 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, p. 171.

45 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

46 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Wither – and Why," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 39, 42, 43.

Smith's statement, also cited earlier, that "of the various ways of finding out what something means to the person concerned, one way is to ask him ...," may seem typical of his "personalist epistemology," but it must not therefore be considered trivial. It often takes a lot of evidence to make something self-evident. An incident pertaining to the scientific method in the background of the Middle Ages highlights the point. Once a heated debate occurred at a monastery as to the number of teeth a horse had and the disputing monks kept alluding to Aristotle, Galen and other intellectual luminaries of the ancient world as authorities. When, in the course of this debate, a novice had the temerity to propose that the gathered monks might wish to visit the stable nearby and have it from the horse's mouth, as it were, by counting the teeth, the poor fellow was ejected from the gathering for proposing so unscholarly a procedure. At the core of both the phenomenological method as identified by Eliade, and the historical method as identified by Smith, is the irreducible *sui generis* quality of religion.[47] Call it the "sacred" or "faith," its latitudinal study flourishes as phenomenology and its longitudinal study as history.

Not only have similar approaches *in relation to the insider's perspective* been advocated by both Mircea Eliade and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, both have been attacked on the same ground – that by *accepting* the insider's account they *endorse* it. The charge is a familiar one in the case of Eliade but it has also been levelled at the historical method advocated by Smith, as applied by Thomas B. Coburn.[48] It requires to be cited in extenso:

> Another remark of Coburn is even more disturbing: "That the Purāṇas have developed from an early nucleus to their present extent is historically verifiable, according to academic criteria. Whether that nucleus was of human or divine origin is obviously beyond the range of these criteria.... It is a matter of personal faith. Before it, academic inquiry must remain silent" (38). This silence – or is it tacit acceptance? strikes at the very foundation of scholarly inquiry, which presupposes the human origin of the objects of that inquiry, be they texts, beliefs, or institutions. Furthermore, personal faith does not assert that only the nucleus of a sacred text is of divine origin; it dictates that the text is entirely sacred and, therefore, that the entire text has a divine origin. Preserving just a nucleus of sacrality, it appears to me, is a greater offense to religious faith than letting the faithful deal with such matters on their own. A quote from W. C. Smith used by Coburn to show that historical study is compatible with faith, illustrates this problem well: "history is not a closed system, since as agent within it stands man, his spirit in some degree open to the transcendent" (pp. 43–44). This is clearly a theological assertion and not the conclusion of scholarship. What historical or other evidence is there to support either the existence of a 'transcendent' or of the openness of the human spirit to it? Religions have gods, goddesses, and similar divine beings; they do not have a 'transcendent', this type of generic religion is not good scholarship. It is probably not even good theology.[49]

[47] See Daniel L. Pals, "Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?," passim.

[48] Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).

Opinions, however, differ on the transcendent[50] and one must revert to the central issue. Is the religious method of studying religion at the mercy of the insider? Does he or she hold the sword of Damocles over the head of the scholar of religion? May the insider not have his or her own axe to grind? May the insider not be wrong?

The issue is not that the believer may be wrong, but rather, getting as close as one can to what the believer may be wrong *about*. Therefore the insistence on the believer's standpoint does not mean that the religious method of studying religion is uncritical. After all, something has to be excluded for something to be included. The insider may have "blind spots"[51] and may even indulge in rationalization, and even the nature of this rationalization can differ from the fact that it is offered because the religious attitude as such "cannot be grasped by any interpretation"[52] to the opposite fact, that it may be offered because "religious behaviour can also function to satisfy

[49] Patrick Olivelle, Book-Review: *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* by Thomas A. Coburn, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107:4:774 (October–December 1987).

[50] Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 11, p. 275.

[51] William E. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 108.

[52] W. Brede Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

and maintain any number of psychological and social needs."[53] Similarly, although "anything I say about Islam as a living faith is valid in so far as Muslims may say 'amen' to it," yet "the reverse is not true. Not every statement *about* Islam that is acceptable to Muslims is *ipso facto* true: one can flatter or beguile;"[54] the "lens of comparative religion ... includes the idea that religion is itself a lens;" however, its telescopic lens may not always align smoothly with the microscopic lens of an individual tradition; and not only the "interpretation of 'religion' can vary dramatically," it can he argued that religion, as the generic, may be nothing more than a mere construct. Then one may study the sacred in the study of religion but there is nothing sacred about studying religion religiously, only appropriateness in certain contexts and perhaps not in others. As has been pointed out already, the point is not that the believer is absolutely right but that the believer has an absolute right. In this respect he no more forfeits his absolute right as a believer when he is not absolutely right, than a mathematician forfeits his claim to be one when he or she commits an arithmetical error; or when an accountant commits a computing error or a novelist commits an orthographical error. Moreover, the fact that no human being "knows all the possible meanings of any of his heliefs," no more compromises his or her integrity than the fact that because we do not know all the meanings of the words we use, we therehy compromise the meanings in which we do use the words.

Ironically, the expert use of the phenomenological method, which is based on gaining an understanding of a religion *through* a believer, could produce paradoxical results, so that "an inquirer who is not a Christian can sometimes understand the essence of Christianity more clearly than a Christian believer or even a Christian theologian, and conversely, a scholar who is committed to Christian faith can understand other religions better than the adherents of those religions."[55] In fact a religionist "who assumed that understanding a religion 'in the believer's terms' can only be the same thing as believing that the believer believes would be a confused specimen indeed" for, as only approximation is possihle, one may "distinguish between the significance of a phenomenon for the believers concerned and the meaning which it acquires for the understanding scholar"[56] which, even if identical, would be numerically different.

Not only is it not the case, it is not the issue. The issue is the isomorphic nature of the irreducibility of the *sacred* in the phenomenological approach and the irreducibility of *faith* in the historical approach, namely, that 'the existential nature of the datum is never disclosed by research.' The fact that these terms cannot be defined has caused many "scientific" students to throw up their hands in despair. These formulations such as 'sacred' or 'faith' pertain to the nature of religion, but the religious way of studying religion commences "when we can bring ourselves to forget about the nature of religion ... It is well known that a physicist cannot define matter but he can handle it."[57] The religious way of studying religion does the same.

IV

Just as there is an artistic way of studying art, a musical way of studying music, a literary way of studying literature and a medical way of studying medicine, there is a religious way of studying religion. It may be argued that these parallels are misleading. I would agree that they do not go all the way but they go quite a long way in substantiating, by analogy, the case heing proposed for a religious way of studying religion. This becomes particularly clear when we recognise the points at which the analogy holds and the points at which it snaps.

William E. Paden, like others before him,[58] uses the analogy of art in three ways to strengthen the case for a religious study of religion:

53 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

54 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Wither – And Why," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 43.

55 Joseph M. Kitagawa, Introduction. To Joachim Wach, *Understanding and Believing* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), p. ix.

56 Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion Between Reality and Idea," p. 174.

57 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither – And Why," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 191.

58 Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion Between Reality and Idea," p. 165.

(1) "religious expressions, like artistic expressions, should be understood at their own level, that is, in terms of their own unique ways of structuring experience;"[59] (2) religious experience is inseparable from social, economic, political or other dimensions of life, yet not reducible to it, just as the arts "*can* be explained from the viewpoint of other fields, but like them it can also be investigated and understood in terms of its own way of viewing the world;"[60] (3) just as there are "thousands of systems of sacred things ... [t]here are thousands of kinds of works of art."[61] Paden associates this comparison between religious and artistic expressions with the name of Mircea Eliade,[62] leaving it unclear whether Eliade himself[63] draws such an extensive comparison, or whether the comparison helps elucidate Eliade's position. In any case, it is apparent that the parallel is helpful. Paden, however, is not blind to the differences between religion and art: "More than the arts, which are temporary enclaves of imagination, religions generate what might be called enduring, even timeless models of reality."[64] Such awareness enables him to recognise that "while religion is like art in that it has its own language, it is also parallel to government and even science in the way its language functions as an institutionally based law of the land and a map of reality."[65] The latter aspect, which he identifies as the habitative function of religion, offers to its adherents a way of "*inhabiting* the world," which takes religion beyond art.[66] However, for the point under consideration, the analogy nevertheless holds, that religions can be studied in "terms of their own religious visions,"[67] just as art can be studied in terms of its own aesthetic vision.

The parallel with music is also instructive. We can study music "not just as a product of society or culture, but in terms of music

59 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
63 Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 86.
64 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
65 *Ibid.*
66 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
67 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

itself (rhythm, harmony, and so on)."[68] The absurd consequence of not doing so can be illustrated with Mozart's music reduced to the description of the muscle movements of the various participants in an orchestra. There are, however, a few other ways in which the analogy of music can be applied to religion. A particular religion is a complex of several dimensions; it represents a blend of several elements so that, as an ensemble, it may be compared to a symphony in which all believers participate, whereas the resonance of a religion in an individual believer may be compared to a melody. The analogy can be extended from the study of religions as such to even the study of comparative religion, and to the interplay of similarity and difference the comparative process involves. As Paden observes: "Where a theme emerges then the variations themselves give richness to the theme, just as in the use of the theme and variations in music. By the time a musical theme has been expressed in different major and minor keys and in different tempos and moods, it comes back at the end more impressively than in its simple statement at the beginning. We then hear the theme more fully because we hear it in terms of its variations all the different things the theme has been and can be. It is this way in the comparative approach to religion, too."[69]

The parallel with literature presents more difficulties. Those who *deny* that there is a religious way of studying religion employ this analogy in a double-edged way. On the one hand, they take its application to religion as stating the obvious; on the other hand, they use the example to bolster their *own* case for reductionism. But first the admission: "The issue is not whether the manifest subject is religion. Of course it is. No one says otherwise. No one denies that the data to be explained are overtly religious. No one denies that adherents themselves deem the data religious. No one denies that believers pray because they believe in God. Freud and Marx deny only that the data are most deeply religious."[70] The point is then pressed further as follows:

68 *Ibid.*
69 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
70 Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*, p. 45.

> No one denies that to whatever extent the data finally get categorized as irreducibly religious, they must be explained religiously. Here the analogy with literature holds. To categorize the Iliad as literature rather than history is to be committed to studying it literarily rather than historically. To point out that the Iliad can also be read as history is merely to add that it can also, whether or not more deeply, be studied historically. The issue is what the subject is, not which approach follows from the determination of it.[71]

According to them, however, the point at issue is precisely to "what extent the subject *is* religion rather than psychology or economics." Or more incisively: "the issue is not whether religion must be explained religiously alone but whether it must be explained religiously at all. More accurately, the issue is not whether the *direct* but whether the *underlying* source of religion must be religious at all."[72] Thus, arguing that "just as the literary critic deals with literature as literature, so the scholar of religion deals with religion as religion," misses this point that "the issue is not whether religion must be explained religiously alone but whether it must be explained religiously at all."[73]

In other words, the problem with citing literature as an analogy is that literature may not be literature, just as religion may not be religion. Brook Thomas is quoted to clinch this point: "The New Critics argued that literary historians too ofteu subordinated literature to history and as a result ignored what was uniquely literary about literature ... The belief that there is a distiuct form of writing which is literary has been attacked by structuralists and post-structuralists. The New Historicism has sustained this attack. Whereas New Critics emphasized the uniqueness of the discipline of literature, New Historicists emphasize interdisciplinary analysis as a way to understand culture at large. In its 'cultural studies,' no discipline, including literature, has a privileged status."[74]

Perhaps a point has been missed here. Literature is surely *apparently* literature or classifiable as literature, although it may not

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

ultimately turn out to be so. The same could be true of religion. Thus there could be a religious way of studying religion at the proximate level, even if it turns out that ultimately it is at the bottom sociology or psychology. Nor should religion's definition as 'ultimate concern' delude us here; it could easily be conceded that religion believes itself to be ultimately concerned with what it may in fact not be ultimately concerned. But so long as it believes itself to be so concerned it can be studied on its own terms. The issue is pedagogical and not metaphysical – the study *of* religion, with which we are concerned, is by definition a second-order study; it does not itself claim to be religion nor does it make any claim on behalf of the ultimate (as distinguished from the empirical) reality of either religion as such or any religion.

V

The case of science sheds even more light on the issue. Let medicine be taken as an example. A medical way of studying medicine is to trace illnesses to their causes in terms of pathogens. An economic way of studying medicine would be to classify them according to the cost of curing them. The cause of medical conditions need not be medical – poverty can cause illnesses but note that now we have departed from a medical way of studying medicine. It is revealing that medicine itself is discovering that the cause of medical conditions may not be medical. For instance, it has been found even in countries like Canada, where health-care covers the whole population, the wealthy *still* live healthier and longer lives, even when traditional risk factors such as "smoking, diet and genetic" match. Thus the medical way of studying medicine is disclosing that the causes of disease may not be medical.[75] Similarly, the religious way of studying religion *may* reveal that all religion is not all religious. Frank Reynolds's discussion of the secular forces responsible for the spread of Buddhism fits this picture rather well.[76]

[75] Paul Taylor, "Why the Rich Live Longer, Healthier," in *The Globe and Mail*, Oct. 16, 1993, A1, A2.
[76] Daniel L. Pals, "Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?," p. 270. Pals refers here to chapters on Buddhism by Frank E. Reynolds in Niels C. Nielsen, Jr., ed.,

VI

Two issues are often conflated in the present context: (1) that there is a religious way of studying religion and (2) that religion is ultimately religious. This point emerges clearly from an examination of the following passage.

> Undeniably, there must be symmetry between the analysis of a phenomenon and the phenomenon being analyzed. If the true nature of religion is irreducibly religious rather than, say, sociological, religion must be analyzed religiously rather than sociologically. The question is what the true nature of religion is.
>
> No social scientist denies that if the true nature of religion is irreducibly religious rather than sociological, religion must be explained and interpreted religiously rather than sociologically. Nor does any social scientist deny that the manifest nature of religion is religious. None denies that believers themselves explain and interpret religion religiously. None denies that believers pray because they believe in God. None denies that believers are stirred by prayer. The issue is whether the true nature of religion is religious. The "true" nature need not mean the sole one. It can mean the ultimate one.[77]

In the movement towards the ultimate here two proximate points have been short-circuited. First, the question is not merely "what the true nature of religion is;" the question is *also* "what is the true nature of religion *according to the believer*." The two truths, the phenomenological and the philosophical, may not coincide. The second point is provided by the allusion to prayer, about which Segal remarks elsewhere: "to confine oneself *to* the believer's point of view is to treat the believer as the *subject not of study but of worship*."[78] The point has clearly been misconstrued. The point of study is the subject's act of worship, and not the worship of the worshipper (in which some extreme forms of devotionalism have been known to indulge).

It is quite possible for a religious way of *studying* religion to exist and for religion itself not to be a religious but a social or psychological phenomenon. Similarly, one must distinguish clearly between studying *a* religion and studying religion. The following statements need to be distinguished:

(1) There is a religious way of studying *a religion*;
(2) There is a religious way of studying *religions*;
(3) There is a religious way of studying *religion*.[79]

The religious way of studying *a religion* consists in aligning oneself as closely as possihle to the point of view of the believer of that religion.

The religious way of studying *religions* consists in studying them in terms of what have been identified as their own "forms of expression," such as myth, symbol and ritual. Such a study may be called *comparative* religion, as distinguished from the study of *a* religion. "The premises of comparative religion are that religion is a worldwide form of culture that needs to be understood before it is explained, and that to understand it means to know its cross-cultural patterns and varieties in balanced perspective. The parts can then be seen in relation to the whole, variations in relations to themes, and innovations in relation to global historical patterns. Thus one cannot fully understand a god, saviour, or creation myth withont comprehending the whole range of gods, saviours and creation myths."[80]

Note that for understanding *a* religion in its singularity or angularity, such an exercise is not necessary because the believer of *a* religion, the "committed insider might not wish to see things in this lateral fashion. The believer usually assumes his or her religion to be unique and sufficient. One's needs for religious knowledge do not go beyond it – it is all one needs to know. Its forms are *not* seen as

Religions of the World (third edition) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 165–218.

77 Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*, p. 7.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 23, emphasis supplied.

79 On these and allied issues also see Jacques Waardenburg, "The Problem of Representing Religions and Religion," in Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi, eds., *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik* (Marburg: Diagonal Verlag, 1991), pp. 31–56; "In Search of an Open Concept of Religion," in Michel Despland and Gérard Vallée, eds., *Religion in History: The Word, The Idea, The Reality* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), pp. 225–240; "The Language of Religion, and the Study of Religion as Sign Systems," in Lauri Honko, ed., *Science of Religion. Studies in Methodology* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), pp. 441–457 and 482–483.

80 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

variations of universal patterns but singular, self-contained revelations."[81]

It is at this point that the social scientists seem to be misled by the fact that the categories of comparative religion may not exactly coincide with that of the believer. This prompts the claim that religionists, even phenomenologists of religion[82] no less than social scientists, go beyond the self-understanding of the believers.[83] However, this is recognised by religionists themselves.[84] The difference lies in this, that in the case of the religionist the understanding is vertical and categorial, in other words phenomenal and integral; in the case of sociologists and psychologists, etc., it is epiphenomenal or reductive. Two observations may help clarify this point. (1) Eliade has emphasised that when one strives to "grasp the symbolic meaning of religious facts," "[o]ne cannot insist strongly enough that the search for symbolic structures is not a work of reduction but of integration."[85] (2) Social scientists seem not to accord sufficient role to the distinction between *a believer* and *believers* in the present context. This may be due, to a certain extent, to the way in which the singular and plural usages overlap in the following oft-cited statement of the phenomenological position by W. B. Kristensen:

> Let us never forget that there exists no other religious reality than the faith of the *believer*. If we really want to understand religion, we must refer exclusively to the *believer's* testimony. What we believe, from our point of view, about the nature or value of other religions, is a reliable testimony to our own faith, or to our own understanding of religious faith; but if our opinion about another religion differs from the opinion and evaluation of the *believers*, then we are no longer talking about their religion. We have turned aside from historical reality, and are concerned only with ourselves.[86]

81 *Ibid.*, p. 75, emphasis added.

82 Thomas Ryba, *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 233.

83 Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue*, p. 147.

84 Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

86 As translated and cited by Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, p. 228.

From the point of view of the present discussion the issue is crucial. When a religion is looked upon as consisting of a plurality of believers, then the religion or the culture concerned *often itself has a perspective on such pluralism*. For instance, in Hinduism it finds expression in the doctrine of *adhikāra-bheda* or the appropriateness of different paths to different people; in Buddhism in the doctrine of *upāyakauśalya* or skilful means; in Judaism and Christianity in the doctrine of multiple levels of meaning of scripture; in Islam in the multiple appropriations of the figure of the Prophet; in China in the doctrine of *san-chiao* or the Three Teachings; and in Japan in the statistical fact that the total returns for membership of all religions represented in Japan regularly exceeds the total population of Japan!

There is prima facie no reason why multiple understandings should not also function at the level of symbols. This point has been made forcefully by Mircea Eliade:

> All this could be formulated in another manner. Symbols are capable of being understood on more and more "elevated" planes of reference. The symbolism of darkness allows us to grasp its meaning not only in its cosmological and initiatory contexts (cosmic night, prenatal darkness, etc.), but also in the mystical experience of the "dark night of the soul" of St. John of the Cross. The case of the symbolism of the Symplegades is still more evident. As for the symbols expressing the coincidentia oppositorum, we know what role they have played in philosophical and theological speculations. But then one may ask if these "elevated" meanings were not in some manner implied in the other meanings, and if, as a consequence, they were, if not plainly understood, at least vaguely felt by men living on archaic levels of culture. This poses an important problem which unfortunately we cannot discuss here; how can one judge how far these "elevated" meanings of a symbol are fully known and realized by such and such an individual belonging to such and such a culture? The difficulty of the problem rests in the fact that symbols address themselves not only to the awakened consciousness, but to the totality of the psychic life. Consequently, we do not have the right to conclude that the message of the symbols is confined to the meanings of which a certain number of individuals are fully conscious, even when we learn from a rigorous investigation of these individuals what they think of such and such a symbol belonging to their own tradition. Deprh psychology has taught us that the symbol delivers its message and fulfils its function even when its meaning escapes awareness.[87]

87 Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbo-

The social scientist could ask: How is this different from the view that the symbolic satisfactions are really social or psychological rather than religious? This is certainly possible, but should one also not consider alongside the fact that "the comparative perspective builds a context for interpreting religious life, providing an 'educated,' resonant matrix of associations and patternings that has *itself been derived from a study of the different traditions*,"[88] based on "the point of view of the believer"[89] or the "viewpoints of the believers?"[90] It is not just the phenomenologist but also the historian who seeks to understand the insider, both at the conscious level and at a level beyond it. That Mircea Eliade would want to do so may not surprise us but it is sobering and thought-provoking to read what Wilfred Cantwell Smith has to say on this point:

> To understand a symbol, I am contending, one must both know it objectively and in addition must know what it means, *has meant*, in the lives of and consciousness (*including the subconsciousness*) of persons.[91]

Finally, is there a religious way of studying religion as a generic phenomenon? It is here that the sharpest differences between the social scientists and the religionists arise, for if religion is generically taken entirely one way or the other, the previous two categories are automatically affected. Sometimes two very different sources produce the same symptom in medical science: the same headache may result from watching too much T.V. or from dyspepsia. One must note, however, that, as a *condition*, headache remains a medical phenomenon; as a cause it ceases to be so in the case of the T.V. fan. Sometimes, however, the *condition* itself may be confusing – as when a death may have occurred either from cardiac arrest or a broken heart. This is another point which has been lost sight of: that when the study of religions claims that it is polymethodic its thrust is not

lism," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

88 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 76, emphasis added.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

91 See Willard Oxtoby, ed., *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 168.

agglutinative, it is analytical. With these nuances in mind, then, I would like to maintain that there is indeed a religious way of studying religion. It might be then asked: How much of religion would religionists know if they knew religion alone? One must distinguish here between the religious method of studying religion and religious studies. Religious studies includes all manner of studying religion both religious and non-religious. The point of this essay is to affirm that there is a religious way of studying religion, not that it is the only way of studying it.

VII

It is clear, then, that the study of religion can be identified as operating at four different levels and at each level there is a religious way of studying religion.

(1) Religion, at the level of the individual believer, is studied religiously when it is studied from the believer's point of view;

(2) religion, at the level of a religious tradition, is studied religiously when the multiplicity of the tradition is studied from the point of view of its own matrix evolved by this complexity, or more simply, that the followers recognise themselves in the description;

(3) religion, at the level of religious traditions as a whole – that is, not individually or "traditionally," but globally – is studied religiously when it is studied in terms of categories evolved from the study of the data provided by the preceding procedures themselves; and

(4) religion, at the most generic level, is studied religiously when its claim to providing a unique perspective is entertained seriously,[92] despite the ambiguity which may surround its nature,[93] interactively with others. For instance, "[i]f critics of religion see religion as merely camouflaged psychological needs, religion can easily see psychological needs as camouflaged religious needs."[94]

92 Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion between Reality and Idea," p. 155, note 67; p. 157.

93 Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 46ff.

94 William E. Paden, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

It is clear then, that there is a religious way of studying religion (which is not to say that it is the only way religion can or ought to be studied) and that the identification of the religious way(s) of studying religion has been facilitated by the phenomenological approach to the study of religion.

One final point. I hope this chapter has given a fairly clear indication of what one means by a 'religious way of studying religion.' Unfortunately the idea is perhaps clearer than the expression used to describe it. In other words, the description of the concept is perhaps more problematical than the concept itself! Jacques Waardenburg, for instance, responded to the plea contained in the chapter with the following caveat:

> One specific point is your plea for a "religious way" of studying religion, just as music and literature should be studied in a "musical" or "literary" way. This is a tricky point, however. As you know, in common understanding as well as in scholarly discussion a "religious" way of studying religion apparently precludes it having a scholarly character, and this of course should be retained at all costs. Can you use another expression than that of studying religion "in a religious way?" I thought for instance of "studying religion as an expression" (namely of a communal or individual religious experience). But perhaps you can find a better phrase.[95]

I have not succeeded in finding a better phrase so far. I invite the reader to provide one.

95 Personal communication, 15 February 1999.

Conclusions

Academic investigations are supposed to proceed along a well-recognised trajectory. They consist of a beginning in which the author identifies the nature of his intellectual enterprise, a middle in which she carries it out and an end in which the results of the enterprise are communicated. It is highly desirable that the three stages also appear in that order, although brilliant deviations from it have been known to occnr. An attempt has been made to adhere to that order, now that one has virtually arrived at the end.

To the extent that this treatise is a *historical* survey of the phenomenology of religion, such a conclusion is not strictly required, as the immediately preceding chapters are designed to bring the narrative as close to the present as possible. To the extent, however, that this account may lay claim to not merely being a historical but a critical survey as well, a conclusion seems bighly desirable.

I

In the course of providing such a conclusion I would like to make the following points.

(1) The phenomenology of religion has rendered a signal service to the study of religion by bringing the issue of the insider versus the outsider into the open, and by ending the preceding academic culture of silence in this respect. This is not to say that it solves the issue. Its contribution in this sense is Socratic: it raises it. Once raised it has produced an echo-chamber effect through the corridors of the academia.[1]

The point is in danger of appearing unremarkable until it is realised that many developments in the academia we are now famil-

1 James B. Wiggins, "Openings and Closings," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60:1 (1992), p. 112.

iar with represent the assertion of the insider's perspective. In this sense Orientalism is a particularly vigorous application of the phenomenology of religion in the negative. It focuses on the *rejection* of the insider's view rather than on the cultivation of the insider's perspective. Similarly, Women's Studies constitutes the application of the phenomenological method in terms of the gender divide as distinguished from the religious. It can also be viewed as a more strident assertion of the insider's perspective compared to the more staid nature of such exercises within the phenomenology of religion. The two form part of the same continuum. Post-modernism constitutes a more fundamental epistemological attack on objectivity, but the epistemological position attacked is one called implicitly into question by the phenomenological method. The espousal of the insider's perspective therefore has proved a much more powerful solvent than its association with so arcane-sounding a field as the phenomenology of religion would initially lead one to imagine. Even within the field of the study of religion several methods were characterised by a disregard for the insider's perspective. The historical method was applied magisterially, if not majestically[2], with little regard to the people whose history was being described and even in such a field as the psychology of religion Sigmund Freud disregarded (not the data but) the views of insider implicitly when he dubbed religion the "collective neurosis of mankind," an attitude anticipated by J. H. Leuba.[3] The phenomenological approach within the study of religion has perhaps served to mitigate the excesses of these methods. It has, at the very least, set up the insider's perspective as another point of reference in religious studies. In this respect the very success of the revolution may tend to blind us of its magnitude, both within the field of religious studies and even beyond.

2 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither, and Why?," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 44. For a balanced first hand account see Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America – A Woman's Journey* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), Chapter 10.

3 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Company, 1975), pp. 104–105.

(2) Having generated this debate, the phenomenology of religion has also played a role in extending it from the study of world religions to the field of methodology in the study of religion. It has now almost become a cliché to say that the study of religion is both multi-traditional and polymethodic.[4] Its role with respect to the first is obvious and much appreciated, but its role with respect to the latter is obvious only upon reflection, and much contested. It arises from the fact that it claims to be a method in the study of religion itself, and in doing so *itself* becomes part of the plurality of methods of studying religion, even as it advocates a way of studying the plurality represented by the many religions. To the extent that, as a method, it might at times make the claim, explicitly or implicitly, that it is the only valid way of studying religion, it generates *contention*, even as it might, like any other method. It, however, also provides for *correction*, by enabling us to "more confidently sense when explanations of religion do not succeed"[5] because they carelessly, or worse cheerfully, transgress the self-understanding of the believers.

To the extent that, as a method, it might solipsistically claim uniqueness it exposes itself to attack, but it makes a positive contribution to the extent that, in the broader setting of methodology, its presence tends to curb the unduly reductionistic tendencies of other methods.

(3) Another implication of the phenomenology of religion for the study of religion has been subtler. Other methods in the study of religion often claim to be objective; at least such a claim is often staked on their behalf. By comparison with them the phenomenology of religion tends to be 'subjective.'[6] Even as a method what it claims to achieve is an "approximation" of the insider's perspective. Other methods may claim more definite results. By its very nature, how-

4 Charles Elliott Vernoff, "Naming the Game: A Question of the Field," *The Council on the Study of Religion Bulletin* 14:4 (October 1983), pp. 109–113.

5 James B. Wiggins, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

6 Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 224, 243; see Jacques Waardenburg, *Reflections on the Study of Religion: Including an Essay on the Work of Gerardus van der Leeuw* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), Part Three; Eric J. Lott, *Vision, Tradition, Interpretation, Theology, Religion and the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), Chapter 9, etc.

ever, this dimension of the phenomenology of religion encourages tolerance of ambiguity. This ambiguity does have its flip side, but to the extent it reflects the genuine complexity of the subject of study, and not the lack of industry or dexterity of the investigator, it puts one on guard against premature overconfidence of an artificially imposed precision. Notwithstanding this aspect of the question, however, phenomenology of religion *also* lays claim to be scientific in nature! This paradoxical claim, that it is both subjective and scientific, seems to place it in a unique position for participating in the ongoing debate between the theological and scientific approaches to the study of religion. James B. Wiggins, for instance, recalls in the context of the American Academy of Religion:

> The most caustic outpourings I have witnessed in this organization over the years have come from the champions of what they call a "scientific" approach. So far as I can discern there are two basic concerns expressed in tbe critique. First, there is a great desire to be taken seriously by and to engage in serious conversation with scholars who work in other fields of study and who employ approaches to those studies that are admired by the champions of a "scientific" approach. There is an understandable wish to join a conversation in which the participants come from other fields, as well as including others also engaged in the study of religion. Second, there is a high degree of confidence that particular approaches to the study and investigation of any subject yield certain and dependable results, whereas other approaches provide no such trustworthy results. Call the first "scientific" and the latter "theological" when the subject is religion, and the debate is thought thereby to be joined.[7]

He, however, goes on to say:

> But it is my view that for one overwhelmingly compelling reason the terms of such a debate are inappropriate. The issue that confronts the humanities generally confronts the study of religion particularly – the degree of a scholar's tolerance for ambiguity. Study in the humanities unavoidably leads to results that are essentially contestable, rather than sure and certain. Engaging the questions in the contest – struggling, grappling, wrestling with passionate existential urgency – those are for me the *desiderata* and the hallmarks of humanistic study generally, and

7 James B. Wiggins, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–113.

> even more particularly of the study of religion. And when a subject i so engaged it will follow that honest people will from time to tim profoundly disagree and come to conflicting interpretations of eve identical data. That is not a reason to despair about the study o religion. In fact it might be a reason to regret that some other fields o study appear to be so dispassionate and bloodless – so certain.[8]

One can say three things in sequel to this. (1) On account of th fact that phenomenology of religion inherently involves "approxi mation"[9] rather than appropriation, it generates a frame of min conducive to the 'tolerance of ambiguity' referred to in the para graph just cited, as an emotional qualification for the study o religion in general. (2) By virtue of recognising the subjective com ponent of religion, it can relate to the theological side in the disput although with the attendant danger of seeming to compromise it claim to being a-theological.[10] (3) By virtue of claiming to be scien tific, it can relate to the scientific side of the debate, although it i sometimes criticised for not being sufficiently scientific.[11]

In this way the phenomenology of religion may have a somewha unique role to play in the study of religion. Its commitment t *epoché*, which attracts the charge that it is a perpetual fence-sitte may enable us to move freely on both sides of it.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

9 George Alfred James, *Interpreting Religion: The Phenomenological Approach of Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. Brede Kristensen and Gerard van der Leeuw* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Pres 1995), p. 276.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 273–274.

11 See Ursula King, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–129. Two key terms employed within t phenomenology of religion, namely, *epoché* and *eidetic vision* encapsulate th tension. "The *epoché* is often described as 'bracketing', that is to say, a suspe sion of judgment on the part of the investigator as to the truth, value, and some cases also the existence of the phenomenon. The eidetic vision aims grasp the essence of phenomena by means of empathy and intuition. Where the use of the *epoché* is pursued to achieve detachment and some kind of pu objectivity, the intuitive grasp of the essentials of phenomena in their wholen clearly introduces a large measure of subjectivity. Thus, phenomenologi methodology is characterized from the outset by an inherent tension, if not say contradiction, of its underlying principles" (*ibid.*, pp. 39–40).

II

After identifying some of the implications of the phenomenology of religion, it might be worthwhile to turn one's attention to some of its shortcomings, before considering its dangers.

Each method has its own inherent shortcomings. The shortcomings of the phenomenology of religion in this respect have been identified in the body of the book and can also be readily identified in the literature on the subject.[12] I do not intend to repeat these but would like to refer to those shortcomings which it has to overcome from within as it were, in order to be fully effective as a method. One such shortcoming seems to consist of the fact that while the phenomenology of religion, in my opinion, has been quite helpful in understanding different religions on their terms or on their own turf, it has been less so when it comes to understanding religion in general.

The point needs to be refined. It is not that phenomenology of religion has not been effective in defending the claim of the *sui generis* nature of religion, for it has indeed been fairly effective in this (subject to a danger to be identified soon). It has, however, not dealt as effectively with the question: What is religion?[13] It could be counterargued that the field of the study of religion has been remiss in this respect as a whole. This is a strong argument but not a convincing one, for, it seems to me, that phenomenology of religion as a method is uniquely equipped to deal with this. If, as phenomenology of religion seems to claim, religions are more like stained glass windows than see through glass houses (as other methods might), and further, to claim that it has its own way of appreciating the window from the inside, then perhaps we are not unjustified in expecting it to deliver in this respect.

To this shortcoming at the theoretical level may be an added one at the practical level. One way of viewing the phenomenology of religion could well be to see it as a reality check in the study of

[12] Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983), Vol. I, pp. 40, 41.

[13] For how some other methods have gone about answering this question see Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

religion. We all seem to think we know the beliefs and practices of a religion. The phenomenology of religion is a way of finding out if we are right, in the sense whether what we think what Islam is coincides with what Muslims think Islam is. If this point is valid, then it must be occasion for surprise that the phenomenology of religion has not yet devised a way of checking out its own conclusions in this manner. It *has* evolved a way of *presenting* the data of religion from the point of view of the insider but it does not seem to have succeeded in doing so for *checking* out data from the point of view of the insider. I sense a missed opportunity here (without underestimating the difficulty involved in evolving such a procedure).

III

The danger which the phenomenology of religion must forever avoid is that in trying to present the insider's poiut of view (and the further pedagogy which follows from it) it should not be seen as trying to or in fact endorsing the insider's point of view. It must never allow its explicit epistemology to slide into, or even towards, an implicit ontology or 'theology.' How besetting this danger is, is obvious from the fact that the entire field of study of religion can arguably be presented as engaged in some such enterprise,[14] of protecting the turf of religion as it were.

Perhaps it will help strengthen it in its resolve if one concluded with a recognition of the importance of its task, as one struggles to be relevant without sounding apocalyptic. The age of Western imperialism is barely over. It formally came to an end around the middle of the twentieth century, but what are fifty years on the scale in which the lives of cultures and nations are reckoned? For most of the period of imperialism, the West was an outsider to the rest of the world. The fact that it could penetrate inside it does not make it an insider, although it may create the illusion of doing so. If, then, the attempt to understand the rest of the world by the West has to be

[14] See Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

undertaken afresh, then how will it be achieved if one's mode of thinking "is alien to the type of civilization we are trying to understand?"[15]

The answer is obvious. Or it should be, unless the spectre of the clash of civilisations is merely a bugbear. After all, enhanced "mutual understanding between East and West"[16] has been on the agenda of the study of religion in the West for quite some time now. And this can hardly be promoted without first acquiring adequate knowledge of other religions and cultures on their own terms. The term 'phenomenology of religion' may have been first employed by Chantepie de la Saussaye in 1887, but one of its dimensions which I wish to privilege in conclusion was articulated in the first quarter of the first millennium. It is sobering to remember as we approach the second, that Al-Biruni concluded his book on India, known as *Kitāb-ul-Hind* for short, with the following sentiment:

> We think now that what we have related in this book will be sufficient for any one who wants to converse with the Hindus, and to discuss with them questions of religion, science, or literature, on the very basis of their own civilisation. Therefore we shall finish this treatise, which has already, both by its length and breadth, wearied the reader. We ask God to pardon us for every statement of ours which is not trne.[17]

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15 George Alfred James, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

16 Ursula King, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1985), Chapter 12; also see Arvind Sharma, ed., *The Sum of Our Choices: Essays in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholar's Press, 1996), pp. 7–8.

17 Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *Alberuni's India. Translated by Edward C. Sachau* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), p. 246. This is particularly so if one maintains that "[t]he phenomenological approach, in spite of serious shortcomings has much to commend it as it is closely connected with the attempt to develop a hermeneutic appropriate to the study of religion as an integral part of human knowledge and experience" (Ursula King, *op. cit.*, p. 42). The passage serves well to demonstrate the axiomatic belief of phenomenology of religion in a universal humanity, untrammeled by variations of time and space. Even if this belief may not have held for the past it is assumed to be true for our times. Perhaps this belief needs to be problematised in the phenomenology of religion. It may be pointed out, for instance, that if the idea of a "gulf between primal man and ourselves" (Kees Bolle, Introduction, in Jan de Vries, *Study of Religion: A Historical Approach*, trans. Kees W. Bolle [New York: Hardcourt, Brace World, 1967], p. xvi) in the study of religion in general and certainly in the

The point is important because the phenomenology of religion *assumes* the universality of humanity, in assuming the ability of one human being to slip into the shoes or moccasins of another human being. It could be asked whether such an assumption is really required by the phenomenological exercise. The point to note, how-

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phenomenology of religion, given its anti-evolutionary stance (W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 13) as "an old bias may have been overcome the victory is not unanimous, and the victory even shows certain ethnocentricities or, rather, 'culturocentricities'. We cannot say that now the universality of the idea of man has been established. No one is to be criticised for this, but it is of the utmost importance to see that the new diversity in views is due not to the subject matter itself but to the philosophical presuppositions of each scholar" (*ibid.*). Kees Bolle goes on to point out that in the study of religion "the study of religion *per se* has affected the idea of man only rarely but was almost always determined by it" (*ibid.*, p. xvii). He says further: "We are far from having attained a universal concept of man on which to establish the study of religions. The academic disciplines go at the problem of such an idea in very different ways. Perhaps a universal concept of man is even unattainable. This much is certain: we are in great need of honesty in the recognition of our guiding ideas" (*ibid.*, p. xviii). Is it that suspension of our value-judgements in epoché is not enough, that what is called for is the recognition and 'confession' of these as well? And is the phenomenology of religion ready for it?

In any case, the desire on the part of human beings to testify to the belief of others as these 'others' understand the beliefs themselves should not be underestimated. A seventeenth-century Indian text called *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib* bears testimony to it in the following terms: "It is generally spread about tha [all people] belong to [one of] five communities: Hindus, Jews, Magians, Chris tians and Muslims. Each of these five sects claim that their Law is superior ove all others, and in support of their Law they bring forth scriptures giving thei beliefs. After the completion of this book it may once again be stated that som excellent persons have said that among the sects and religions, in the ordinar persons' descriptions of faiths and beliefs, there is to be found much partiality so that truth has remained concealed, especially (now) that, besides the [fiv religions], the number of sects has [reputedly] reached thirty. With this desire [t write impartially] the author engaged himself in writing this book. In this recor of the faiths of one's ancestors, and the beliefs of the different sects, whateve has been recorded has been received from the lips of persons possessed of thos beliefs and from their own books. In the account of individuals of all faiths these are referred to in the same terms of respect as are extended to them by thei disciples and sincere followers, so that there should be no trace left of intoler ance and partiality. The author has no ambition other than that of fulfilling th office of interpreter" (M. Athar Ali, "Pursuing an Elusive Seeker of Universa Truth – the Identity and Environment of the Author of *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 9:3 [November 1999], p. 365).

ever, is that such an assumption is typically made in the phenomenology of religion, whether necessary or not. The assumption is made in the phenomenology of religion per se, as will be clear from the following statement by Gerardus van der Leeuw, parts of which may seem familiar to the reader as they have been cited earlier:

> It is in fact the primal and primitively human art of the actor which is indispensable to all arts, but to the sciences of mind also: – to sympathize keenly and closely with experience other than one's own, but also with one's own experience of yesterday, already become strange! To this sympathetic experience, of course, there are limits; but these are also set to our understanding of ourselves, it may be to an even greater degree; *homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto*: this is no key to the deepest comprehension of the remotest experience, but is nevertheless the triumphant assertion that the essentially human always remains essentially human, and is, as such, comprehensible: – unless indeed he who comprehends has acquired too much of the professor and retained too little of the man! "When the professor is told by the barbarian that once there was nothing except a great feathered serpent, unless the learned man feels a thrill and a half temptation to wish it were true, he is no judge of such things at all." Only the persistent and strenuous application of this intense sympathy, only the uninterrupted learning of his role, qualifies the phenomenologist to interpret appearances. In Jaspers' pertinent words: "Thus every psychologist experiences the increasing clarity of his mental life for himself; he becomes aware of what has hitherto remained unnoticed, although he never reaches the ultimate limit."[18]

Some have even recommended the phenomenological approach to the study of religion, if not for such universal then at least, global reasons. Michael Pye, for instance, identifies the following two goals of the phenomenology of religion of the Dutch variety: (1) to free the study of religion from the control of Christian theology by offering a neutral framework for its study which brackets questions of truth and value and (2) to "grasp the significance of the complex of religious data from the point of view of the believer or participant himself." He then goes on to say:

[18] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J.E. Turner (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), Vol. II, p. 675.

> These two aims of the Dutch school really belong together and in *my view represent the distinctive value* of the term "*phenomenological*" as applied in the study of religion. They may be jointly defined as the attempt to bracket off presuppositions or potential conclusions about the truth, falsity, value or otherwise of a religion, while at the same time striving to grasp its significance for those who believe or participate in it. The combination is difficult to achieve, and demands training and discipline. However, it is quite essential for religion to be studied "phenomenologically" in this sense, if the *subject is to develop the world-wide validity it ought to have.* At this level it is possible for studies of religion to be controlled by external criteria, namely by the accounts given by believers or participants themselves, and the examination and assessment of other scholars. Religion studied phenomenologically, in this sense, is a public subject in its own right. It can be carried on cooperatively by scholars from different countries.[19]

Although one must avoid conflating the global with the universal the two categories seem to overlap here.

Moreover, to the extent that the phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches to the study of religion have not always been divorced from each other, it is perhaps not irrelevant to add that such an assumption in the universality of human nature is taken for granted in hermeneutics as well. A perusal of the following passage tends to confirm this view:

> The natural scientist explains events by employing universal laws whereas the historian neither discovers nor employs such laws but rather, seeks to understand the actions of agents by discovering their intentions, purposes, wishes, and character traits. Such action is intelligible because human actions, in contrast to natural events, have an "inside" that we can understand because we too are persons. Understanding, then, is the discovery of the "I" in the "Thou," and it is possible because of a shared universal human nature.[20]

[19] Michael Pye, "Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1:2–3 (1974), pp. 110–111, emphasis added.

[20] Van A. Harvey, "Hermeneutics," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 6, p. 282. For another dialogical perspective see Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

The idea that all of us can understand each other in some way is central to the phenomenology of religion and seems to assume, in this sense, a universal hermeneutic. However,

> [t]he attempt to construct a universal hermeneutics for the cultural sciences inevitably leads the theorist to propound some theory of human nature and its expressions. Having uncovered the radically different forms of consciousness and belief exemplified in history, for example, Dilthey then thought it important to develop a psychology that would account for this diversity of worldviews while affirming the "unity of human nature" that made it possible for an interpreter in one culture to understand a person in a strange and different culture. But, it may be asked, how can the appeal to some abstract principle such as the "unity of human nature" aid an interpreter who is actually confronted with cultural expressions so different and strange that a sympathetic act of understanding seems impossible? Dilthey never solved this problem.[21]

Phenomenology of religion implicitly assumes that it has found the solution to this "Dilthey paradox." Whether it has done so successfully, as it thinks, and if so, whether it has done so by avoiding getting tied up into knots by avoiding the issue itself, or by cutting the Gordian knot, I leave it to the reader to decide.[22]

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 283.

[22] See Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin Ray, eds., *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Post-Modern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), passim.

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